Beyond the Bubble: Study Abroad and the Psychosocial and Career Development of Undergraduates

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BEYOND THE “BUBBLE:” STUDY ABROAD AND THE PSYCHOSOCIAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGRADUATES

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education
The University of Mississippi

By
VERA V. CHAPMAN

May 2011
ABSTRACT

Parents, as important constituents, along with accrediting bodies, are seeking to know more about how students are prepared “to work and ethically interact in an increasingly complex global community” (Rexeissen & Al-Khatib, 2009, p. 193). Exploration into the career developmental gains associated with study abroad is therefore of increasing importance. This study was driven by the following research question: What experiences and perspectives inform the psychosocial development [as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose] and career development (including career choice and professional identity) of students who study abroad? More specifically, this research addressed the following problems: (a) What personal and career transformation occurs (or is perceived to occur) through the participation in a study abroad experience, and (b) how does the participation in a study abroad program contribute to the development of career choices and life goals?

Participants in this qualitative phenomenological study were senior year students who studied abroad while attending a 4-year public institution in the Southeastern United States. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 female and 17 male participants. After inductive analysis, five themes emerged, including: (a) It was just great expectations! (b) Beyond the “bubble,” (c) Life is all about the people you meet, (d) I grew more than I can ever remember, and (e) I am more confident in my ability to be successful.
Study abroad participation was found to inform the psychosocial and career development of the participants of this study. Psychosocial growth and development occurred along the first six vectors described by Chickering and Reisser (1993). It was found that the study abroad experience did inform the career decision-making of participants, though findings did not support gains in study abroad participants’ professional identity. Furthermore, career development of participants in this study was found to be a multifaceted process supported by gains in development along previous vectors during and after study abroad participation. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made to inform future practice, research, and policy.
DEDICATION

They forced a teary smile as I waved one last goodbye before passing through the airport security gate beyond their sight. My feet dragged as if they were held to the floor by fifty pound weights. Although a great study abroad adventure awaited me, as Daddy’s little girl, I was heartbroken knowing that it would be months before I would see my family again. It still amazes me that my parents allowed their Darling Daughter (that’s what they call me) to live and study on the other side of the world – where they had never been. They willingly watched me walk into the unknown that lay beyond that gate, recognizing that there was a big world out there that I was born to know.

I still have the handmade card that my mother gave me to read on the plane to America. On the cover is a picture of a fairly plain young woman holding a suitcase, ornate angel wings affixed to her back. The words, “Follow your dreams!” curve at the top of the page in my mother’s handwriting. She wholeheartedly believed, and often reminded me, that the world was my oyster. The card was my mother’s way of telling me that I needed to grow my own pair of wings to discover life’s treasures. It was then that I realized that their lives and mine would never be the same again.

“You get your brains from your mother,” my dad often said jokingly. I imagine that my father also had a little bit to do with that. He is a smart man; He knew to push me further than I thought I could go. He taught me to persevere despite obstacles and naysayers who tried to break my stride. “Just show them what you’ve got, Baby!” he would say encouragingly. From placing
first in the 100 meter dash during elementary school athletics, to graduating college at the top of my class, my father had instilled in me a desire for excellence.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, in his absence, I continued to push myself. A semester-long study abroad program soon turned into a seven year educational journey and a marriage to my wonderful David - with only a handful of visits home to South Africa. Despite the lingering sadness that my absence has caused, my parents have continued to support my decision to remain abroad in pursuit of my dreams. That, I know, has been their ultimate sacrifice.

Though thousands of miles continue to separate us, my mother and father remain with me in everything that I do. Their unconditional love and support started the moment I first opened my eyes, making me the person I am today. It therefore seems only appropriate to dedicate this document to André and Moira Van Der Vyver. I can only hope that you are as proud of me as I am of you, because this Doctor could not have asked for better parents. Ek is ondeindig baie lief vir julle!
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

CERI  Collegiate Employment Research Institute

NSSE  National Survey of Student Engagement

SU    Southeastern University

SUG   Southeastern Universities Group
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals who have been instrumental in bringing this dissertation to completion. First, I would like to thank my dissertation committee members for their continued support and guidance: Dr. Amy Wells-Dolan, Dr. K. B. Melear, Dr. David Spruill, and Dr. Marc Showalter. Words fail to fully describe the gratitude and respect I have for Dr. Amy Wells-Dolan, my Dissertation Chair, Advisor, Mentor and friend. Although her plate was typically already overflowing, she somehow still managed to find time in her schedule to help me make sense of this little project. She is a phenomenal educator and I hope that I will one day be able to encourage others as she has encouraged me.

I am also thankful for the invaluable comments and suggestions offered by Dr. Linda Keena (the External Auditor), Dr. Casey Cockrell, and Dr. Amy E. Mark (the Peer Debriefers). I am especially indebted to Dr. Amy E. Mark and Dr. Jennifer Winstead, who helped keep me grounded when I felt overwhelmed by the data analyses and writing processes. A big thank you to Kim Chrestman for being an irreplaceable problem-solver and information hub in the School of Education. Without fail, Kim always goes above and beyond the call of duty.

I’d like to thank the participants of this study, who have inspired me through their stories and undeniable enthusiasm for life’s adventures. It was truly an honor to get to know such extraordinary individuals. I continue to be humbled by their sustained support and interest in my research. I would also like to thank my peers, as well as the faculty and staff at SU who helped to
solicit participants for this study. Without their support, I would not have had the opportunity to meet these remarkable students.

The timely completion of this project would not have been possible without the support of The University of Mississippi Graduate School. I remain grateful to have been selected as a recipient of the Dissertation Fellowship, the Summer Graduate Research Assistantship, and the Graduate School Council Research Grant. Funding from these sources freed my schedule from campus responsibilities so that I could devote myself fully to the dissertation process.

Thank you also to the Office of Health Promotion at The University of Mississippi, where I held a Graduate Assistantship that fully funded most of my graduate studies. During this time, I was encouraged and supported by the student affairs staff in this office, especially Rhonda Tompkins and Ellen Schafer. This office also partially funded the transcription services used in this study. Without this support, I would surely still be transcribing interviews.

I’d like to thank my wonderful family and friends for continuing to invite me to social gatherings, despite the fact that I turned down most invitations due to time constraints related to my research. I have a lot of making up to do! I am also grateful for everyone’s continued interest in my writing progress, even though they did not always fully understand what the excitement and tears were about. It was especially encouraging that so many of my friends took time out of their busy schedules to attend my final defense presentation.

I am humbled by my friends and family in South Africa who have continued to invest time in me despite our geographic separation. Thank you in particular to my brother, Deon Van Der Vyver, who dutifully listened to daily progress reports over the telephone. I am so appreciative that our relationship has grown stronger during this past year.
Finally, I’d like to express a special thank you to my incredibly supportive husband, David Chapman, who often reminded me to take myself less seriously throughout this sometimes overwhelming process. I will forever remember his encouraging smiles and silly faces during the dissertation defense presentation. He has a way of making everything okay. “You can do it, Baby!” he would say enthusiastically, sometimes several times a day. Throughout the research process, he brought me food and willingly took over household chores when I was spinning in circles. Words fail to adequately describe what his love and support has meant to me during the dissertation process and the past five years of our relationship. I’m not sure that I would have come as far as I did, had it not been for him – my very best friend. I can only hope that I may one day return the favor.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview of the Study

Researchers have found that college affects the student in a number of significant ways. The collegiate experience not only enhances the student’s intellectual competence, but most often also supports psychosocial development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This holistic development is deemed an important outcome of college, and institutional mission statements have evolved from a sole focus on intellectual development to include a focus on the psychosocial elements of self-understanding, tolerance for diversity, morality, interest, career readiness, and citizenship (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Keirsey (1998) believed that character growth and maturation does not simply occur naturally over time, but instead must be awakened within the social environment in a developmentally appropriate manner. Therefore, in order to promote the holistic development of students, universities typically offer a broad range of opportunities and programs in which students may participate. One of these opportunities is the study abroad experience, which allows students to immerse themselves in a foreign culture while studying at a host institution outside of the United States.

Thelin (2004) explained that study abroad became a customary component of the Bachelors degree experience during the 1970’s, along with internships and field experiences. According to the Institute of International Education (2010) the number of American students
participating in study abroad programs has doubled over the past two decades, with approximately 260,327 students participating during the 2008/2009 academic year.

Global competency is considered an essential skill in today’s increasingly globalized society, and involves an acceptance of cultural differences, a commitment to equal rights, foreign language competency, and world knowledge (Reimers, 2009, January 30). Many believe that colleges are in a critical position to contribute to the global competency of students through programs such as study abroad (Reimers, 2009, January 30). It is not surprising, then, that institutions like Goucher College and Arcadia University have pioneered programs in which they require students to obtain some academic credit abroad to be eligible for graduation (Fischer, 2008, June 20). Officials at these institutions hope that such initiatives will support students’ global perspectives and foster students’ identities as citizens of the world (Fischer, 2008, June 20).

While not all institutions have made such an intentional commitment to international study, many universities continue to make significant fiscal and personnel investments to develop, coordinate, and administer voluntary study abroad programs at host institutions (Wortman, 2002). As students and parents respond to the current economic downturn, directors of study abroad offices at American institutions report increased pressure to justify costs (Fischer, 2008, April 12). Such justifications often involve references to student outcomes, especially in light of questions like, “What do we really know about the worth of these programs?” (Gillespie, 2002, July 5, para. 2) being asked among members of the media, the general public, federal and state officials, and students and their families (Upcraft, 2003). Upcraft (2003) explained that there is a mounting pressure for higher education institutions to
answer questions related to the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of programs in order to
determine whether a particular program is really needed within an era of declining resources.
Program assessment not only speaks to the worth of such programs, but is also critical for
strategic planning, accreditation, cost justification, and the improvement of students services
(Upcraft, 2003).

The unfortunate reality is that study abroad has gained a wide reputation as “little more
than an extracurricular activity” (Posey, 2003, p. 5). Gillespie (2002, July 5) explained that
although students are able to speak at length about the bullfighters in Spain and the color of the
sky during their travels, the lack of formal assessments of study abroad programs diminishes the
public’s understanding of the deeper intrinsic value associated with study abroad participation.
Consequently, much research has been devoted in recent years to uncover the personal benefits
and psychosocial outcomes associated with international study. Among other outcomes,
researchers have identified gains in identity development (Bates, 1997; Comp, 2000),
competence (Helms & Thibadoux, 1992; McLoud & Wainwright, 2008) and autonomy (Nash,
1976; Pyle, 1981). Wallace (1999) believed that the primary objective of study abroad programs
should be the psychological growth of the student, characterized by gains in self-respect and an
enhanced world-view.

However, although the holistic development of the student is an important outcome of the
collegiate experience, parents usually send students to college with a big picture in mind that
includes many intended outcomes, including personal growth and the purposeful crafting of a
brighter future marked by personal and career success. It is therefore worth asking whether an
investment in programs such as study abroad is warranted in terms of the career development outcomes of participants.

In this way, parents, as important constituents, along with accrediting bodies, are seeking to know more about how students are prepared “to work and ethically interact in an increasingly complex global community” (Rexeissen & Al-Khatib, 2009, p. 193). With multiple constituents keeping a close eye on students’ readiness for the world of work, exploration into the career developmental gains associated with programs such as study abroad is of increasing importance.

Hansel and Grove (1986) believed that the study abroad experience fosters character, confidence, and strength that may carry over into an individual’s personal and professional life. However, exactly how these experiences inform students’ professional development remains unclear – even sometimes to study abroad participants themselves. Research conducted by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State indicated that study abroad participants showed an inability to articulate how the experience has shaped their professional development and career readiness (CERI, 2008). In the aforementioned study, students’ inability to use their experiences to their advantage during job interviews was further evidenced by the lack of significant increase in the employment outlook of study abroad participants.

In short, despite the existing “small body of research” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) focused on the outcomes of study abroad participation (e.g. Helms & Thibadoux, 1992; Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Posey, 2003), what remains to be explored is the shared perceptions and experiences that inform the career development of students who study abroad.
Purpose of the Study

In light of the pervasive lack of understanding regarding how study abroad participation may foster personal and career development within an increasingly complex global community, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the psychosocial and career development of undergraduate students who study abroad through programs offered at a large 4-year public institution in the Southeastern United States.

Research Questions

This study was driven by the following research question: What experiences and perspectives inform the psychosocial development [as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose] and career development (including career choice and professional identity) of students who study abroad? More specifically, this research addresses the following problems: (a) What personal and career transformation occurs (or is perceived to occur) through the participation in a study abroad experience, and (b) how does the participation in a study abroad program contribute to the development of career choices and life goals?

Significance of the Study

The answer to the aforementioned research questions will inform practice within the Study Abroad, Career Services, and student Mental Health fields. First, if we are able to identify the essences of students’ study abroad experiences that are most meaningful to career development, attempts could be made to implement these experiences universally across programs in order to support the career development of all study abroad participants. We could
therefore potentially answer the question posed by Gillespie (2002, July 5), if only in part: “Are there any core experiences that every student in a study-abroad program should share?” Study abroad administrators may therefore potentially find this research useful when creating new study abroad programs or when amending and standardizing previously existing programs.

Second, a deeper understanding of the career developmental and mental health processes of students who study abroad could aid Career Services and campus Mental Health Professionals to tailor services specifically to their needs – both while at home and abroad. Finally, if we are able to identify the career developmental outcomes associated with study abroad participation, we may better utilize growth opportunities by assisting students in formulating a study abroad career plan prior to departure.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study’s focus on psychosocial and career development is rooted in the psychosocial development theory of Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993). The first six vectors identified by Chickering and Reisser create a strong framework for the organization of study abroad outcomes research presented in the second chapter of this document. These vectors are: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy towards interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, and (f) developing purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In addition to psychosocial development theory, the lived experiences of undergraduate students who study abroad are compared to the existing theoretical frameworks of the career development theories of Ginzberg et al. (1951), Donald Super (1972), and Linda Gottfredson (1981), which will also be discussed in the second chapter.
Overview of the Methodology

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological approach which is appropriate because the study aimed to uncover the “meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience” (Patton, 2002, p.104) of undergraduate students at 4-year public institutions in the Southern United States who study abroad. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this study aimed to explore the core meaning that the study abroad experience holds for students’ career and personal development.

Using Creswell (2009) as a guide, data analysis included the following steps: (a) transcribing interview data, (b) reading through all of the transcriptions for a general overview, (c) coding the qualitative data, and developing a codebook, (d) generating thick descriptions of the research participants through the use of themes and theme connections, and (e) interpreting the meaning of the data in terms of existing research, and lessons learned.

Data was analyzed using the inductive technique of reflective analysis, which is characteristic of the phenomenological approach. Meaning units and themes were compared across the reports of all participants in order to uncover major and minor themes common to all participants. The chosen methodology resulted in a thick description of the shared experiences of undergraduate students who study abroad through programs offered at public 4-year institutions in the Southern United States, while focusing in particular on how such shared experiences relate to psychosocial and career development.

Basic Assumptions

Phenomenological research requires the researcher to set aside personal assumptions in order to “describe things as they are, not as the participant (or researcher) typically, and
automatically, interprets things based on past experience” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496). Against this background, I will briefly disclose my personal assumptions relevant for the proposed study. My first assumption was that individuals would have experienced some level of personal and career developmental changes while studying abroad, and that these changes will likely be perceived by them to be largely positive in nature. My second assumption was that this change would have been persistent, and that students would be aware of such change, or that they would gain awareness of change during the interview process. My third assumption was that students would be able to articulate these changes as they explored their experiences retrospectively. However, I remained mindful throughout the study that these assumptions may have been incorrect and I refrained from interpreting participants’ stories based on my own experiences of living and learning abroad. To further guard against researcher bias, I used techniques such as “epoche” (Creswell, 2003, p. 52), “bracketing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 158), and member checking (Creswell, 2009), which have enhanced the trustworthiness of the data.

**Delimitations**

This study limited itself to undergraduate students in their senior years attending a 4-year public institution in the Southern United States, which will be referred to as Southeastern University (SU). The purpose of the research is not to focus on the successes or failures of specific study abroad programs offered through SU, but rather the essences of the lived experiences of students who partake in these experiences. For this reason, senior year students of all majors and backgrounds were invited to participate, provided that their only experiences of living and learning abroad was through participation in a study abroad program during college. Students who have experienced aspects of K-12 schooling abroad, or who have lived abroad
prior to college, were excluded. The study utilized a phenomenological approach and the focus of data analysis and interpretation was therefore not generalization or causation but instead to provide a “richer account of human action” (Manning & Stage, 2003, p. 22).

Though Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory of student development is used to frame the existing study abroad research, it should be noted that the seventh vector, Developing Integrity, has been excluded from this discussion. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors occur sequentially in a stepwise fashion, and build on one another. The development of integrity is therefore deeply rooted in the foundations of identity and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, because development along this highest order vector typically occurs during the latter two years of college and beyond (Chickering, 1969), an exploration into integrity is beyond the scope and focus of the current study.

The study was intended to focus on the psychosocial and career development of students who study abroad, and therefore excluded theories related to cognitive-structural development. Career development theories were chosen based on their relevance to the collegiate years, and those theories that did not specify ages for the completion of developmental tasks were excluded. Learning theories and typology theories also were excluded in the discussion of career theories because they would offer little insight into the career development of students who study abroad and are therefore beyond the scope of the proposed study. The exploration of career development within the research findings was limited to career choice and professional identity, and not workforce readiness or career typology.
Limitations

This research has limited generalizability due to the exploratory nature of the qualitative study, as well as the unavoidable regional focus created by the unique culture of the 4-year public institution in the Southern United States from where participants were drawn. In addition, the participants’ insights may be particular to the unique study abroad programs in which they engaged at this institution, and may not bare relevance to study abroad programs with different characteristics or policies within the same institution or other institutions.

The study is further limited in that it only provides insight into the experiences of senior-year students who have studied abroad at some point during their undergraduate careers at SU. Hutchins (1996) believed that college students need within six months to a few years to fully understand the vocational implications of their study abroad experience. Within this sample it is expected that most of participants would have studied abroad during the latter part of their academic careers, therefore leaving limited time to reflect upon the impact of their study abroad experiences on career choice and development. In addition, the participants have not yet entered the work-force, and were therefore not be able to discuss the impact of the study abroad experience on career-specific skill development and work-force readiness.

Definition of Terms

Career: Career refers to “the activities and positions involved in vocations, occupations, and jobs as well as to related activities associated with an individual’s lifetime of work” (Zunker, 2002, p. 9).

Career Choice: The selection of and commitment to a profession or type of occupation.
Career Development: The American Counseling Association defines career development as “the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total life span of any given individual” (Engels, 1994, p. 2). Zunker (2002) explained that the term reflects an individual’s life goals as well as the “tasks that affect career choices and subsequent fulfillment of purpose” (p. 9). For the purposes of this research, career development is defined more narrowly as the processes involved in career choice, preparation, and professional identity of college students.

Career Self-Efficacy: An individual’s perceived level of confidence in their ability to perform the activities necessary for career planning and development (Lent, Brown, Hackett, 2002). It does not refer to the actual abilities a person may have to accomplish a task, but a person’s belief in their own abilities (Bandura, 1997).

Host Institution: The foreign institution at which the American student studies for credit awarded by their home institution in the United States.

Identity: A metaphor describing the “flexible self-in-context” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 188), which includes historical, biological, cultural, and social dimensions of individual students.

Identity Development: The process of working towards a stable sense of self and a full understanding of what one believes. Identity development involves facing biological, environmental, and psychosocial challenges (Wortman, 2002). Moshman (1998) believed that identity formation involves evaluation of multiple potential selves and the eventual commitment to a particular conception of the self.
**Personal Growth:** Changes in a person’s inner world, including the personality, identity, and psychological flexibility (Couper, 2001).

**Phenomenological Research:** Research that aims to explore what shared meaning (or essences) an experience holds for those persons who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This approach is based in phenomenology (Husserl, 1913), and is defined as “the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena” (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2007, p. 495).

**Professional Identity:** “The relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764-765). Professional identity therefore reflects the student’s perceptions regarding his or her role as future professional in the workforce.

**Professional Identity Development:** Professional identity is developed through the exploration of multiple selves (Ibarra, 1999) or self-awareness processes (Hall, 2002). This type of development occurs throughout the lifespan as a natural byproduct of the progression along various life and career developmental stages (Super, 1957), including career exploration (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Super, 1972), or as a result of the active processing of feedback given by others (Hall, 2002).

**Psychosocial Development:** Psychosocial development is the continuous, orderly, and cumulative process that progresses the individual from a simple to a more complex state, and depends on the satisfactory completion of preceding developmental tasks (Miller & Winston, 1990). In this study, the developmental tasks include those discussed by Chickering and Reisser
(1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy
toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and
developing purpose.

**Self-awareness:** The process by which a person becomes familiar with who they believe
themselves to be, “including the fundamental issues of feelings, self-esteem, identity,
importance, appearance, and worthiness” (Couper, 2001, p. 4).

**Self-concept:** “One’s self-perceptions, formed through experience with the environment”
(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 219). For instance, the term academic self-concept refers to
students’ self-evaluations of their academic abilities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Coopersmith (1967) discussed that the concept of self is formed through observations of the self
and the evaluation of others’ reactions to one’s attitudes, appearance, and performance.

**Self-esteem:** Self-esteem “expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates
the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and
worthy” (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 4-5).

**Study Abroad:** Study abroad programs are broadly defined as educational programs in a
foreign country for which the American college student receives credit at their home institution
in the United States (Herman, 1996). According to the Institute of International Education
(2010), 54.6 percent of American students studied for a short term (i.e., a summer, or one to two
months) during the 2008/09 academic year. During the same year, just over 40 percent of
students chose to participate in study abroad experiences lasting a quarter to a full semester, and
only 4.3 percent of students studied for one academic or calendar year. In light of the focus of the
study abroad experience as a temporary educational program, the definition of study abroad includes a maximum time abroad of one calendar year for each completed study abroad program.

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter provided an overview of the study, which examined the psychosocial and career development of undergraduate students at a 4-year public institution in the Southern United States. It offered an overview of the study, including the background to the study, its relevance and purpose, the research questions under study, the delimitations and expected limitations, as well as definitions to relevant terms.

Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature to the fields of study abroad and career development, and focuses on two primary areas: (a) study abroad outcomes research framed within Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) Psychosocial Development Theory, and (b) a brief discussion of the career development theories relevant to the collegiate years, including those of Ginzberg et al. (1951), Donald Super (1972), and Linda Gottfredson (1981).

Chapter three describes the proposed qualitative methodology of this study, including information about the proposed population and sample, the role of the researcher, data collection procedures, strategies for validating findings, data analysis procedures, and anticipated ethical issues.

Chapter four outlines the results of the study, and offers individual profiles of each of the participants. Shared major and minor themes that have surfaced during analysis of the research are also discussed.

Chapter five contains a discussion of the findings of the research as they relate to the research questions, which focuses on exploring the experiences and perspectives that inform the
career development and decision-making of students who study abroad. An overall conclusion of the research study is offered, as well as implications of the study for practice, research, and policy.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Psychosocial development theory has often been instrumental in promoting an understanding of college student growth and development among higher education scholars and practitioners. In recent years, there has been an increased focus in determining the psychosocial developmental outcomes associated with participation in study abroad programs. In the review of the literature that follows, the psychosocial development theory of Arthur Chickering (Chickering, 1969) and later, Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993), is used to frame studies relevant to the psychosocial development of students who study abroad.

It should be noted that very few of the studies included hereafter are grounded specifically in Chickering’s theory. However, these studies provide insight into constructs central to Chickering’s (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) seven vectors of development, namely: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity.

The review of the literature is therefore discussed as follows. First, Arthur Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) student developmental theory is summarized in order to form the foundation of the literature review to follow. Second, the first six of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors are explored in greater detail and in sequence, paired with relevant study abroad research appropriate to each of the specific constructs. Third, career development theories
relevant to the collegiate years are discussed. Finally, shortcomings of available study abroad outcomes research are discussed and a case is made for the need to engage in further exploratory study regarding the career development of students who study abroad. A summary of the reviewed literature signals the close of the chapter.

An Introduction to Chickering’s Theory of Student Development

Arthur Chickering (1969) presented his model of student development in his foundational work, titled, Education and Identity. His theory was largely based on the body of literature regarding student change existing at the time, including the work of Erik Erikson. Chickering’s model is based on the fundamental assumption that “colleges and universities will be educationally effective only if they reach students ‘where they live,’ only if they connect significantly with those concerns of central importance to their students” (Chickering, 1969, p.3).

Chickering (1969) focused mainly on the development of identity, which he defined as the process of “discovering with what kinds of experience, at what levels of intensity and frequency, we resonate in satisfying, in safe, or in self-destructive fashion” (Chickering, 1969, p.13). He proposed that identity development occurs across seven vectors: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) developing autonomy, (d) establishing identity, (e) freeing interpersonal relationships, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity.

True to Eriksonian principles, Chickering’s vectors represent the successive and essential developmental tasks that have to be achieved successfully in order to facilitate identity development. In his original theory, Chickering (1969) believed that the successful resolution of the first three vectors is critical for identity achievement (i.e., the fourth vector), which ultimately creates the necessary foundation for overcoming the challenges of the last three vectors. In
essence, it is only when the student has discovered and accepted his unique identity that the
pursuit of intimacy, purpose, and integrity can follow.

Chickering’s original (1969) theory focused on traditional age college students, and
within this group, he proposed that freshman and sophomore year students typically find
themselves within the first three vectors, while upperclassmen typically find themselves facing
the last four vectors. However, his model was severely limited in that it did not address the
preoccupations and perspectives of a diverse student population.

Although Chickering failed to address issues of diversity, he did not propose that all
students were the same. He recognized, for instance, that students may enter their academic
careers while facing different vectors. Chickering identified external influences such as
institutional or family characteristics that may influence the attainment of each vector. Although
vectors are sequential in nature, they should be envisioned as a step of spirals, rather than a
straight line. Differences therefore exist in the ways that students face each of the vectors.

After much research was conducted to test the validity of Chickering’s theory, Arthur
Chickering’s (1969) foundational work was revised in 1993 in collaboration with Linda Reisser.
In the resulting book, also titled Education and Identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), the
authors modified Chickering’s original theory of student development. The concept of the seven
vectors remained the same, though naming and sequencing of the vectors were changed.

Major changes occurred for the first, second, third, fifth and seventh vectors. These
changes are discussed under the description of each vector following in the next section. Most
significantly, after reviewing others’ research related to Chickering’s (1969) original theory, the
vectors were renamed and renumbered to the following: (a) developing competence, (b)
managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy towards interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (f) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser’s revised theory is briefly outlined in Table 1. A more detailed discussion of each vector follows.

Table 1
Chickering’s Seven Vectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chickering’s Vectors</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vector 1: Achieving Competence</td>
<td>Development in this vector entails the tasks of developing intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal competence. The student gains confidence in his or her ability to be successful in the aforementioned areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector 2: Managing Emotions</td>
<td>Development in this vector includes gaining the ability to recognize, accept, and appropriately express emotions in a flexible manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector 3: Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence</td>
<td>To develop along this vector, the student must gain emotional independence, self-directedness, problem-solving ability, and persistence. In addition, the student must gain awareness of his or her interdependence with the larger community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector 4: Establishing Identity</td>
<td>Development in this vector requires forming “a solid sense of self”. (Chickering, 1969, p.80), which includes a comfort with body and appearance, gender and sexual orientation, and socio-cultural heritage. Personal stability and integration, self-acceptance and self-esteem are important aspects of this vector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector 5: Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships</td>
<td>To develop mature interpersonal relationships, the students must accept and appreciate individual and cultural differences, and build a capacity for healthy and sustainable intimate relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector 6: Developing Purpose</td>
<td>Development along this vector requires that the student develops clear vocational and avocational interests, goals, and aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector 7: Developing Integrity</td>
<td>To develop along this vector, the student must clarify a system of valid, consistent beliefs that serve as a preliminary guide for behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Compiled from Chickering and Reisser (1993).
The revised volume contained more current research findings from diverse student populations, which revealed the authors’ growing understanding that the uniqueness of each student influences their journey through the vectors. Chickering and Reisser (1993, p. 35) concluded that though each student “will drive differently, with varying vehicles and self-chosen detours, eventually all will move down these major routes” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). Their research further revealed several factors within the college environment that may support each student’s unique step-wise development along the seven vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These factors included: (a) clear institutional objectives, (b) small colleges, (c) positive student–faculty relationships, (d) the curriculum, (e) teaching strategies, and (f) student involvement in organizations (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The seventh vector, Developing Integrity, is not discussed in this review because it is beyond the focus of the current research. Hereafter, Chickering and Reisser’s vectors are described in detail, paired with study abroad research relevant under each of these vectors. Relevant career development theories are discussed during the exploration of Chickering and Reisser’s sixth vector, Developing Purpose.

**Study Abroad Research by Vector**

**Vector 1: Developing Competence.**

The first vector, Developing Competence, consists of three underlying areas critical to competence development: (a) intellectual competence, (b) physical and manual skills, and (c) interpersonal competence. These components - also known as the “three-tined pitchfork” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 53) - were added upon revision of Chickering’s (1969) original work. A sense of competence is defined as “the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 53).


Intellectual Competence.

Prior to the movement towards holistic student development, many institutions of higher education focused solely on fostering the intellectual competence of students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Chickering and Reisser (1994) warn that colleges should not view intellectual competence as the ability to pass subject matter tests, because intellectual competence is reflected in many ways. In truth, it involves the skills of comprehending, reflecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting with the mind. It involves grasping content, appreciating aesthetics, gaining cultural interests, reasoning objectively, solving problems, learning actively, thinking originally, and gaining increased objectivity regarding attitudes, beliefs, and values (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), there are three broad areas of research relevant to intellectual competence:

(1) Acquisition of subject matter knowledge and academic (usually verbal and quantitative) skills tied directly to specific academic programs, and (2) gains in cultural, aesthetic and intellectual sophistication, and expanding interests and activities in humanities and performing arts, philosophy, and history, and (3) the development of general intellectual or cognitive skills, which can be applied regardless of content areas. (p. 55).

As to gains in subject-specific knowledge, several researchers have reported gains in language development. Waldbaum (1996) used an embedded cross-case comparison design to explore gains in the language development of eight students from the University of Denver and the University of Bologna. Framing his study within Chickering’s theory, he found that students who participated in study abroad experiences showed significant gains in the following language
skills: reading, vocabulary, grammar, writing, listening comprehension, and oral proficiency. Interestingly, the most significant gains were reported by students who did not have strong linguistic skills prior to departure. However, the sample is rather small for even a qualitative study, and results should therefore be generalized with caution.

A study by Comp (2000) mirrored Waldbaum’s (1996) gains in verbal ability, and revealed that students felt more competence in their ability to speak a foreign language post study abroad. In this qualitative study using semi-structured interviews, all eight students who studied in a non-English speaking country reported gains in language proficiency. Of these eight students, seven were interested in further strengthening their language proficiency for the host country’s language, while gaining fluency in additional foreign languages.

In addition to gains in language skills, all ten of the participants in Comp’s (2000) study reported gains in knowledge regarding the host country. Participants in Bates’ (1997) also reported gains in knowledge about the host country. This mixed-methods study utilized a sample of 14 honors students who studied abroad in the United Kingdom for a semester, and compared findings to a control group of 35 students who remained at their local campus during the same time period. Ethnographic qualitative data from pre- and post-departure essays confirmed the quantitative findings. As one student said about intellectual gains, “I have considerable, previously non-existent, knowledge of British history and political structures as a result of a class in British politics and researching my thesis on a British subject” (Bates, 1997, p.122).

Helms and Thibadoux (1992) discovered that changes in the cognitive knowledge of 59 business students who participated in a summer study abroad program resulted not only from classroom instruction, but also from independent traveling and contact with the host culture and
other international students in the program. Their mixed-methods longitudinal study measured change through structured surveys completed by all students and informal interviews that were conducted with a smaller subset of the sample. However, major flaws in the research design (i.e., inadequate descriptions of the sample, sampling procedures, methodologies, research variables, and hypotheses) make the significance of these findings unclear.

Similarly, Ryan and Twibell (2000) also discovered that both curricular and extracurricular activities were the sources of gains in academic knowledge and language skills of students who study abroad. The researchers used a longitudinal correlational research design to analyze themes in students’ written responses at three phases: (1) predeparture (n=154), (2) two months into the study abroad experience (n=70), and (3) upon return home (n=101).

Besides subject-specific knowledge, researchers also have discovered gains in the second area of research identified by Chickering and Reisser (1993) as relevant to intellectual competence. Mennonite students in Kaufman and Kuh’s (1984) study reported an increased interest in arts, culture, and literature upon return from their international study tours. However, this mixed-methods longitudinal design employed nonrandom sampling procedures, resulting in an extremely specific sample of 126 Mennonite study abroad students and a control group of 90 Mennonite students who did not study abroad. Generalizations to other populations should therefore be made with caution.

As to the last of aforementioned research areas identified by Chickering and Reisser (1993), gains in general cognitive skills, study abroad outcomes research has revealed conflicting results. Carsello and Creaser (1976), for instance, discovered that more than 40 percent of their sample (n = 209) reported declines in the ability to concentrate on academic work, and
deterioration of general study habits. Given that 75 percent of this group of 209 American students studying in Europe also reported an increased interest in extracurricular activities, these findings were not completely surprising.

Similarly, half of the sample in Comp’s (2000) aforementioned study experienced a decline in academic performance during and after the study abroad experience. For these students, the study abroad experience seemingly awakened an appreciation for experiential learning, and traditional classroom instruction therefore became challenging. As one student reported, “My grades have been slipping since I have been back. I found out there is more to life than school…priorities have gone flip side, so grades are not my top priority anymore” (Comp, 2000, p. 45).

However, contrary to the research findings of Carsello and Creaser (1976) and Comp (2000), Bates (1997) did not find any significant positive or negative changes in learning methods between the study abroad and control groups of his mixed-methods study of 14 honors students studying abroad in the United Kingdom. Findings regarding the general cognitive skills of students who study abroad therefore remain unclear, although there is strong support for the development of subject specific knowledge and gains in cultural sophistication.

**Physical and Manual Skills.**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined physical and manual competence as the ability to use the body “as a healthy vehicle for high performance, self-expression, and creativity” (p. 54). Athletic and artistic activities aid in the development of physical and manual skills. Despite the importance of physical and manual skill, very few studies have explored this level of competence in students who have studied abroad. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained the absence of
research in this area by stating that systematic observations of physical competence may seem superfluous once the basic challenges of acts such as walking, somersaulting, or designing have been met.

Not surprisingly then, only one study could be found that explored physical changes experienced by students who study abroad. Through semi-structured interviews, Comp (2000) found that all ten of his research participants had experienced relatively mild, short term physical changes. Most notably, students reported changes in body weight (most often weight gain), personal grooming, allergies, diet and alcohol consumption, and energy levels.

Two studies were found to be related to physical and manual skills through the focus on specific health outcomes associated with study abroad participation. However, findings in these two studies were contradictory. Ryan and Twibell (2000) used a longitudinal correlational design to assess students at three phases during the study abroad experience: (a) predeparture, (b) two months into the study abroad program, and (c) upon return to their home countries. These researchers viewed students participating in study abroad experiences as a vulnerable population based on the stress and coping associated with studying in a foreign country. Health outcomes were measured using the Medical Outcomes Survey SF-36, which measures 8 core dimensions of health, including: (a) perceived overall health, (b) actual overall health, (c) physical processes, (d) social functioning, (e) pain, (f) vitality, (g) physical role, (h) emotional functioning, and (i) mental health. Research findings indicated that general health remained good throughout the three phases or study, with no significant changes in physical health or vitality throughout the phases of research. However, 20 – 30 percent of students did report emotional problems that
somewhat limited their physical activities (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). The significance of this phenomenon is not reported.

In contrast, Carseillo and Creaser’s (1976) study revealed that a quarter of their sample (n = 209) of American students studying temporarily in Europe experienced deteriorated health while abroad, while only a small percentage (11 percent) reported gains in physical health. It remains unclear whether these findings are statistically significant, though. The researchers explained the deterioration in health as a result of the possible abandonment or neglect of usual health habits, and changes in diet and food. Mixed evidence therefore exists regarding the physical and manual skills of students who study abroad.

**Social and Interpersonal Competence.**

The last component of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) first vector, namely *Social and Interpersonal Competence*, is defined as “skill in communicating and collaborating with others” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 54) – two concepts that are different, yet related. Skills related to communication include the ability to listen, ask questions, self-disclose, give feedback, and to dialogue with insight and pleasure. Skills related to collaboration include working well in groups while aligning personal agendas, helping to facilitate communication between others while being sensitive and empathetic, and maintaining the general direction of conversations (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These interpersonal skills are applicable to work relationships, intimate relationships, and friendships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Researchers have found that the daily challenges associated with surviving in a foreign culture often lead to the development of social and interpersonal skills. Gmelch (1997) reported gains in interpersonal competence in his sample of 51 American students who were studying
abroad. As the instructor for the international study course, Gmelch (1997) required his students to document their travels through travel logs and journals, which were then analyzed for content. He also conducted informal interviews with students during activities and class time, and supplemented the data with his own observations. The data revealed that students typically had very superficial contact with the cultures they had visited. However, the daily challenges associated with international travel forced students to learn about the local cultural systems unique to each country that they visited. Students became increasingly socially adept by finding ways to communicate with host nationals who speak little English, while navigating their way within foreign cultural systems. These research findings are enlightening, but the use of a convenience sample and students’ forced participation in this study severely limit the application of research findings.

Reported gains in the interpersonal learning of students who participate in study abroad programs are not uncommon. In Comp’s (2000) study, eight out of ten research participants reported in semi-structured interviews that they had become more extroverted during their foreign study. In general, they felt more adept at communicating and establishing rapport with others. Similar gains in interpersonal learning were reported by Mahan and Stachowski (1990), who studied the experiences of student teachers who taught in foreign communities abroad. Data was collected through self-report questionnaires, and compared to data from the sample’s American counterparts who remained at their home institutions. The study abroad group showed greater depths in interpersonal learning in relation to the comparison group. Therefore, strong evidence exists for the development of social and interpersonal skills in students who study abroad.
The Sense of Competence.

At the handle of the “three-tined pitchfork” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 53) lies a general sense of competence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) use this metaphor to explain that Intellectual Competence, Physical and Manual Skills, and Social and Interpersonal Competence, are nothing without a general sense of competence. They explain, “Without [the handle], no work can be done, no matter how sharp and sturdy the tines” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 53). Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe the origins of competence as follows:

It comes from how students feel about the worth of their accomplishments, how well they believe they have solved problems or at least coped with them, and how steadfastly they have maintained their equilibrium in the ebb and flow of their college experience. (p. 77)

A sense of competence encourages the individual to “take [their] place among peers as someone not perfect, but respectable as a work in progress” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 82). It also leads to actions that are open and energetic, with increased risk-taking and persistence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). McLoud and Wainwright’s (2008) research revealed that as students overcame stressful situations associated with studying abroad, increased confidence allowed them to take more risks, get more involved, and adapt to their environments. This focus group research with 59 American students further revealed that positive study abroad experiences tended to leave students with an “increased confidence in their ability to have an effect on their environment, a feeling state consistent with an internal locus of control” (McLoud & Wainwright, 2008, p. 68).

Similarly, Gmelch’s (1997) analysis of student travel logs and journals, and data from interviews and personal observation, revealed that students gained confidence and became
increasingly comfortable with taking risks during the study abroad experience. At the outset of the study abroad program, students traveled in groups during weekends. He explained that, “For most students, this was their first time abroad, and they were understandably nervous about traveling alone or even in pairs; they found security in numbers” (p. 480). Over time, however, students became more independent and travelled in smaller groups. One student’s comment, comically illustrates increases in risk-taking behavior as students gain confidence in their ability to survive in a foreign country:

We took the Metro [subway] and trams which was [sic] even more frustrating than the bus system. Along the way, we almost lost Susan, Kelly got her sunglasses stuck in the Metro doors, Susan almost had her purse stolen, and some weirdo put his face in my hair. But we made it to the bagel shop (Gmelch, 1997, p. 487).

Study abroad outcomes research related to Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) first vector, Developing Competence, therefore supports gains in the intellectual competence, social and interpersonal skills, and general competence of students who study abroad. However, conflicting research exists regarding changes in the physical, manual, and general cognitive skills of students who participate in foreign study. Next, study abroad outcomes research regarding Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) second vector, Managing Emotions, is explored.

**Vector 2: Managing Emotions.**

After the student develops competence, they must learn to manage their emotions. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that development along this vector first requires the student to become more aware of their feelings by uncovering the full range of possible emotions, gaining awareness of their varying intensity, as well as the meaning that they may carry (i.e.,
nurturing, toxic, or self-transcending) (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The full range of emotions in Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) revised theory include mental health states such as anxiety, depression, anger, shame and guilt, and not just emotions pertaining specifically to sexual desire, as was proposed in Chickering’s (1969) original theory.

After uncovering the full range of emotions, the student must learn to control these emotions in a flexible manner, and find appropriate ways of expressing and integrating them into attitudes and behaviors. Development along this vector also requires “finding ways to balance negative or painful feelings with positive, uplifting emotions, and integrating feeling with thought and action” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 88). Lastly, the student should gain an understanding of the sources of their emotions and the implications of acting on emotional impulses (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Development in this vector is therefore related to learning self-control and balance of emotions.

Considerable research may be found on the emotional implications of studying abroad. Some researchers, notably those focusing on culture shock, have reported adverse emotional reactions associated with the study abroad experience. Gibson (1991), for instance, discovered through interviews that all nine students in his sample who had studied abroad experienced some level of culture shock during their stay. Culture shock was defined as, “When a person is confronted with surviving in a culture which is in conflict with that individual's own premises and rules for successful living, a mental and sometimes physical disturbance occurs…called culture shock” (Gibson, 1991, p. 18). The researcher found that the intensity of the culture shock depended on the length of the international study.
Study abroad outcomes research outside of the area of culture shock seems to paint a more positive picture. Kauffman and Kuh (1984) found that Mennonite students who studied abroad gained greater sensitivity and increased feelings of well-being upon return from the study abroad experience, when compared to a control group. The researchers employed the Omnibus Personality Inventory to measure feelings of well-being. The results were not found to be statistically significant, though interestingly, students’ feelings of increased well-being persisted at least one year later. It should be remembered that the extreme specificity of the sample makes generalizations difficult.

Similarly, Carsello and Creaser (1976) reported that over 37 percent of their study abroad sample experienced greater peace of mind (after) participating in a study abroad experience, while 34 percent experienced gains in overall emotional health. However, 22 percent of this same sample reported a decrease in peace of mind, while 12 percent reported a decline in general emotional health. It remains unclear whether these findings are statistically significant. Study abroad outcomes research related to gains in Managing Emotions is therefore inconclusive. Next, the third of Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) vectors, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, is explored.

**Vector 3: Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence.**

Autonomy entails the “mastery of oneself and one’s powers” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 118) and “the independence of maturity” (Chickering, 1969). This concept was strongly emphasized in Chickering’s (1969) original vector, entitled Developing Autonomy, but was renamed in the revised theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) in order to stress the importance of striving for interdependence beyond autonomy. Chickering and Reisser (1993) believed that the
student must recognize that although autonomy is desired, “one cannot operate in a vacuum and that greater autonomy enables healthier forms of interdependence” (p. 47), which includes revisiting relationships with parents and building new relationships based on reciprocity and equality. The revised vector therefore involves three distinct components: (a) emotional independence, (b) instrumental dependence, and (c) interdependence.

**Emotional Independence.**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) define emotional independence as, “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (p. 116). The first step in reaching this goal involves separation from parents or caregivers. The student must learn to rely more heavily on peers, authorities, and the support systems available at his or her institution. These experiences will enable to student to feel more confident in his or her own self-sufficiency, and lead to “a balance of comfort with one’s own company and openness to others, without the need to cling” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 122).

Only two studies could be found that focused specifically on measuring changes in the emotional independence of students who study abroad. Pyle (1981) investigated the personal impact of participating in a service-learning project in Jamaica. The sample of 25 students was assessed using the Student Development Task Inventory (SDTI) prior to departure, and upon return from the international study program. When compared to the control group of 14 students, the overseas group showed no significant gains in emotional independence at posttest. Similarly, Lathrop (1999) found no significant differences in the emotional independence of 40 students who studied abroad. This non-equivalent control group design utilized the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA).
Although very little research measured changes in students’ emotional independence per se, Gmelch’s (1997) research did report findings that reflect the importance of relying on peer relationships during the study abroad experience. As mentioned previously, Gmelch (1997) followed the adventures of 51 of his American students who were studying abroad temporarily in Europe. Through analysis of students’ travel logs and journals, informal interviews, and personal observation, the researcher learned that students relied heavily on each other for support and companionship during their foreign travel. Students typically traveled in groups of about 4.6 students large, and spent most of their time interacting with one another. Students seemingly avoided traveling alone because it made them anxious. The result was that students had much less interaction with the local culture and environment than the researcher initially expected.

**Instrumental Independence.**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) theorized that instrumental independence consists of two major components. First, there is, “the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed manner” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). Second, instrumental independence includes “the freedom and confidence to be mobile in order to pursue opportunity or adventure” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). By mere definition, then, participating in a study abroad experience would build instrumental independence, in that the student becomes mobile in pursuit of educational opportunities within a foreign culture, during which time they are often forced to act in self-sufficient ways. It is not surprising, then, that several researchers have reported gains in instrumental independence for students who participate in foreign study.

In his research of American student studying abroad in Europe, Gmelch (1997) found that students had changed in two broad areas: 1) increased self-confidence, and 2) increased
adaptability. Analysis of students’ travel logs and journals, interviews, and personal observations revealed that experiences outside of the comfort of home had taught students that they are capable of autonomous decisions and behavior. Students had become more self-reliant and confident in their ability to handle complex and unanticipated situations during the study abroad experience. The challenges of travel also forced them to become competent and organized information gatherers. At the end of the study abroad experience, one student remarked, “I now have the confidence that I can handle any situation I encounter, in some way, even if I am alone, unable to communicate easily and unsure of the culture” (Gmelch, 1997, p.484).

McLoud and Wainwright (2008) reported similar gains in instrumental independence. Through focus groups with 59 American students, the researchers learned that overcoming stressful situations while studying abroad often led to changes in self-perceptions and increased self-confidence. As one student expressed after studying abroad, “[I] feel like I can handle just about anything” (McLoud & Wainwright, 2008, p.68). The authors explain that students who had positive experiences tended to have “increased confidence in their ability to have an effect on their environment, a feeling state consistent with an internal locus of control” (McLoud & Wainwright, 2008, p. 68).

Contrary to these findings, Pyle (1981) reported no significant gains in the instrumental independence of students who participated in a service-learning project in Jamaica. However, he did find gains in the general autonomy of these students. The researcher used a non-equivalent control group design and administered the Student Development Task Inventory (SDTI) to measure the impact of the experience on students across 13 independent variables. Results indicated significant gains in general autonomy for the experimental group, while the control
group showed no significant gains for this variable. It should be remembered that the unique nature of this service-learning project may limit generalizability to study abroad programs that do not share a service focus.

**Interdependence.**

The final component of the third vector, *Interdependence*, is considered to be “the capstone of autonomy” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 140), and is defined as “an awareness of one’s place in and commitment to the welfare of the larger community” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained that in order to develop interdependence, the student must first gain autonomy and a sense of awareness of his or her place in the larger community:

> With the growing knowledge that every action has an impact on others and that freedom must be bound by rules and responsibilities, individuals moving toward interdependence learn lessons about reciprocity, compromise, sacrifice, consensus, and commitment to the welfare of the larger community…Interdependence means respecting the autonomy of others and looking for ways to give and take. (p. 140)

Specifically related to globalmindedness, Hutchins’ (1996) study revealed that study abroad participation is related to gains in a sense of connectedness to a global community. She analyzed data from interviews, focus groups, and group diaries of a purposive sample of six students who had participated in foreign study, and found that these students exhibited broadened perspectives post study abroad. The amplitude of this change depended on the following factors: students’ maturity prior to studying abroad, minority experiences, the geographic location of the
program, the level of cultural immersion experienced during the program, participating in multiple study abroad programs, and the focus of the program.

Two researchers focused specifically on evaluating the changes in interdependence of students who study abroad. Pyle’s (1981) non-equivalent control group design with students who participated in service-learning projects in Jamaica employed the self-developed Student Development Task Inventory (SDTI) to measure the impact of the experience on students’ interdependence. T-tests revealed significant gains in interdependence in the experimental group, while the control group showed no significant gains in this variable. The author explained that the nature of the program required students to work together and be team-oriented, which made significant gains in interdependence an unsurprising finding.

Contrary to Pyle’s (1981) findings, however, Lathrop (1999) found no significant differences in the interdependence of 36 undergraduate students who participated in semester-long study abroad programs, when compared to a non equivalent control group of 30 students who had not participated in a study abroad experience. The researcher used the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA), which included a subscale that specifically measured Interdependence.

In summary, study abroad outcomes research relating to Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) third vector, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, does not provide indisputable evidence for gains in autonomy or interdependence. Research shows no significant gains in emotional independence, while conflicting evidence exists for gains in instrumental independence and interdependence. Next, study abroad outcomes research
pertaining to Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) fourth vector, *Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships*, is explored.

**Vector 4: Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) define relationships as “connections with others that have a profound impact on students’ lives” (p. 145). Relationships are powerful, because they enable students “to learn lessons about how to express and manage feelings, how to rethink first impressions, how to share on a deeper level, how to resolve differences, and how to make meaningful commitments” (p. 145).

Initially, this vector was titled *Freeing Interpersonal Relationships* (Chickering, 1969), and was fifth in sequence. However, upon revision of Chickering’s (1969) original theory, it was renamed to Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and renumbered as the fourth vector. Sequencing this vector before *Establishing Identity* (i.e., the fifth vector), reflected “the importance of students’ experiences with relationships in the formation of the core sense of self” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.39).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) believed that in order to develop mature relationships, the student must rebalance his or her need for autonomy and attachment, essentially “moving from distance to closeness in some cases and from intimacy to separation in others” (p. 145). This vector requires discovering peers that are different from themselves, as well as those that share commonalities. Relationships may be brief in duration, or powerful, and may lead to the positive outcome of “enduring warmth” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 145) or the negative outcome of “the sorrows of hurt and rejection” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 145).
By its very nature, the study abroad experience creates the opportunity to interact with diverse people, which typically leads to the discovery and often also the appreciation of differences. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain that learning tolerance and gaining appreciation of cultural differences is core to the development of mature interpersonal relationships. They define tolerance as “a willingness to suspend judgment, to refrain from condemnation, and to attempt to understand an unfamiliar or unsettling way of thinking or acting rather than to ignore, attack, or belittle” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 146).

Several researchers have reported changes in students’ tolerance for diversity after a study abroad experience. Helms and Thibadoux (1992) used structured surveys and informal interviews to measure the impact of international study on the perceptions and attitudes of 59 students who participated in a summer study abroad program. The researchers found significant gains in cultural awareness, and explained that, “because of their involvement [with the host culture] they became comfortable around people from other cultures and more tolerant of people holding opinions different from theirs” (Helms & Thibadoux, 1992, p.6). However, it should be noted that major flaws in the research design (i.e., inadequate descriptions of sampling criteria, sample demographics, research methodologies, and hypotheses) make the significance of these findings unclear.

Similar findings were reported by Wallace (1999), who examined the long-term impact of study abroad experiences on world and personal perspectives. Inductive analysis of survey and interview data revealed significant growth in students’ appreciation of cultural differences. As one student reported, “Travel to Greece has helped me understand that there is more than life in America. The American way is not the only way. This helps in dealing with people that don’t
always agree with me” (Wallace, 1999, p.90). Another student reported that the study experience “helped me learn to understand, be tolerant of, and work/live with other people who have very different backgrounds than my own” (Wallace, 1999, p.90).

McCabe (1994) analyzed student journals and conducted interviews and personal observations to assess how the Semester at Sea Program impacted students’ global perspectives along the following dimensions: (a) fear versus openness, (b) views of people as same or different, or same and different (c) cross-cultural understanding versus naiveté, (d) attitudes towards Americanism, and (e) global-centrism versus ethnocentrism. His research revealed that these five dimensions were significantly shaped by the study abroad experience. Students’ prior experiences, formal academic instruction, informal shipboard experiences, and experiences occurring after their return home all played a role in increasing tolerance for diversity (McCabe, 1994). However, it should be noted that the Semester at Sea Program is unique in that students who participate in this program typically spend 50% of their time aboard a cruise ship with mostly American peers, and 50% of their time on land in various countries interacting with the locals for up to one week per port (McCabe, 1994). The lack of cultural immersion therefore likely limits its representativeness of all study abroad programs.

Two researchers studied changes in the intercultural sensitivity of students who study abroad - an important component of tolerance for diversity. First, Gillin and Young’s (2009) research with social work students who engaged in a study abroad program revealed that the experience was instrumental in developing cultural sensitivity. Through analyzing three prescribed papers of each student (n = 40), the researchers found that the study abroad program “gave the students the experience of being ‘the other.’ This provided them with a deeper
understanding of what is involved in working with clients who are members of cultural groups other than their own” (Gillin & Young, 2009, p. 42). Furthermore, personal experience with the frustration of being a second language speaker in a foreign country made students more compassionate towards others in similar positions upon return to America.

Second, the qualitative portion of Zhai’s (2000) mixed-methods research also revealed gains in intercultural sensitivity and openness to diversity in students who studied abroad. However, there was a discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative results, the latter of which did not reveal any significant changes. This discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative results may be due to the relatively small sample size of the study abroad group (n = 21), which was not powerful enough to provide statistically significant results.

Although most studies generally revealed increases in openness to diversity, one researcher found a “ceiling effect” (Wortman, 2002, p. 56) for this variable. Wortman’s (2002) ex post facto study focused on changes in undergraduate students’ attitudes toward diversity resulting from participation in a semester long study abroad experience. The author also examined the outcomes related to the type of program, and the primary language spoken in the host country.

Quantitative analysis in Wortman’s (2002) study revealed that the study abroad group (n = 100) exhibited high levels of openness to diversity prior to departure, and that a significant increase in this variable was evident after the study abroad experience. However, students who scored high on this variable prior to departure tended to show less significant increases in openness to diversity, while some even declined in openness, creating a “ceiling effect” (Wortman, 2002, p. 56). The control group (n = 88), on the other hand, exhibited no
significant change in the dependent variable. Further examination of the variables indicated that
the most significant increases in cultural diversity were evident in students whose programs fully
immersed them into the English-language culture. Those studying in non-English speaking
cultures showed no significant changes in openness to diversity.

The second component believed by Chickering and Reisser (1993) to be core to the
development of mature interpersonal relationships is gaining a capacity for intimate
relationships. Though this may seem separate from tolerance for diversity, the concepts are
related because both require the student to learn to accept individuals for their uniqueness, to
respect and appreciate the differences they bring to the table, and to empathize with others
(Chickering & Reisser, 1993). An enhanced capacity for intimacy involves a healthy shift from
overdependence or excessive dominance towards interdependence, viewing intimate partners as
they are, with unconditional positive regard. Trust, open communication, and healthy intimacy
(both sexual and nonsexual) create a nurturing environment between intimate partners. The
student must learn to differentiate between nurturing and toxic relationships, and become
selective in the relationships they engage in. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain that the
student should learn that “stability and loyalty endure through crisis, distance, and separation” (p.
147).

Very little research focusing specifically on study abroad participants’ capacity for
intimacy has been conducted. Pyle (1981) found no significant differences in the development of
mature interpersonal relationships of students who participated in service-learning projects in
Jamaica. This variable was measured by the Mature Interpersonal Relationships Scale (MIR) and
its subscales: Intimate Relationships with the Opposite Sex, Mature Relationships with Peers, or
Tolerance. No significant differences were found on any of the subscales, indicating that students who participated in service-learning abroad did not gain capacity for intimacy.

Similarly, a study by Herman (1996) found no change in students’ capacities for mature interpersonal relationships by gender, level of cultural immersion, or interaction between the two. He measured the impact of the study abroad experience as it relates the vector of Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships as a whole by assessing 76 students who studied abroad pre- and post-departure, using the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI). However, it should be noted that results may not be generalizable due to limited sample size, lack of homogeneity of the sample, and lack of control for extraneous variables possible due to the inclusion of disparate study abroad programs. Interestingly, the researcher found moderate correlations between variables related to Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) vectors of Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Establishing Purpose, which supports Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) sequencing of vectors.

Contrary to research by Pyle (1981) and Herman (1996), students in James’ (1976) study reported that improvements related to the ability to interact and relate with other people (including peers, those of the opposite sex, and authority figures) was the most or second most important result of their participation in a study abroad experience. Upon return to their home countries, 66 percent of students considered themselves socially adept and confident.

In summary, study abroad outcomes research regarding the fourth of Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) vectors, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, is inconclusive across two elements: tolerance for diversity, and capacity for intimacy. Strong research evidence exists to support that gains in tolerance for diversity and cultural sensitivity are
associated with studying abroad, though research relating to the capacity for intimate relationships is inconclusive. Next, Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) fifth vector, Establishing Identity, is explored.

**Vector 5: Establishing Identity.**

In order to establish identity, the student must successfully have developed all preceding vectors. In some sense, identity development is involved in all of the previous vectors. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain, “Establishing identity certainly involves growing awareness of competencies, emotions and values, confidence in standing alone and bonding with others, and moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem” (p. 173). Identity development primarily involves resolving various crises in order to gain:

1. Comfort with body and appearance,
2. Comfort with gender and sexual orientation,
3. Sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context,
4. Clarification of self-concept through roles and life-styles,
5. Sense of self in response to feedback from valued others,
6. Self-acceptance and self-esteem,

Most study abroad outcomes research applicable to the vector, Establishing Identity, has focused on the development of the interrelated constructs of: (a) self-confidence, (b) self-esteem, (c) self-efficacy, and (d) differentiation of the self. As to the first of these, studies by Gmelch (1997), McLoud and Wainwright (2008), and Comp (2000) revealed significant gains in self-confidence. Through analyzing students’ travel logs and journals, informal interviews, and personal observations, Gmelch (1997) found that experiences outside of the comfort of home had taught students that they were capable of autonomous decisions and behavior. Students became
increasingly confident in their ability to handle complex and unanticipated situations, thereby
gaining self-confidence. Similarly, Mc Loud and Wainwright (2008) found through focus group
research that students who completed a successful study abroad experience reported greater
confidence in self and changed self-perceptions. Gains in self-confidence were attributed to
adjusting to new, often stressful situations. One student’s comment illustrated his new-found
belief in self when he said that there is “no reason I can’t do whatever I want to do” (McLoud &

Comp (2000) also found gains in self-confidence in 80 percent of his sample (n = 10). Similar to the participants in McLoud and Wainwright’s (2008) study, Comp’s (2000)
participants attributed this change to the increased ability to operate autonomously in a foreign
context. As one students explained, “I had proved to myself at least that I would be able to, even
under the most strenuous circumstances, be successful not only academically…but also in
meeting people and going out and doing things” (Comp, 2000, p. 47). In addition, 60 percent of
the sample reported increased self-esteem and more positive self-perception.

Also related to changes in self-esteem, Juhasz and Walker (1987) found significant gains
in the self-esteem and self-efficacy of 70 study abroad participants between pre- and post-test.
These researchers measured changes in self-worth and feelings of competence, and found that
students who studied abroad for a full year experienced greater change along these dimensions
than those who studied for only one semester. This study, however, did not utilize a control
group for comparison.

Specifically pertaining to changes in self-efficacy, Bates (1997), Milstein (2005), and
reported significantly greater gains in the total self-efficacy of students who had studied abroad (n = 14), when compared to a control group (n = 35) whose total self-efficacy remained largely unchanged. The experimental group showed significantly greater gains in attitudes toward their personal and individual characteristics. Quantitative findings were supported by ethnographic qualitative data from pre- and post-departure essays. One student summarized gains in identity development well, “Socially, I was very afraid before to have people think badly of me. Now, after the trip, I don’t care anymore. I am who I am, and if some people don’t like me – oh, well” (Bates, 1997, p.124).

Similarly, Milstein (2005) found that 95.5 percent of students (n = 212) who participated in a study abroad exchange to Japan reported retrospectively that their self-efficacy had increased during the program. In addition, the researcher found a positive correlation between participants’ self-report level of challenge experienced during the program, and participants’ perceived changes in self-efficacy. Successfully overcoming the challenges of foreign study, therefore, supported the development of self-efficacy for participants in this study.

One study revealed conflicting results regarding changes in self-efficacy. Quantitative results in Zhai’s (2000) mixed-methods study with 21 study abroad participants revealed no significant increases in self-efficacy. Qualitative analysis, however, revealed that participants became more confident during the study abroad experience, likely due to facing the challenges of foreign travel and culture. Study abroad seemingly offered a unique opportunity for students to get to know themselves and become more self-reliant. Furthermore, students reported increased confidence from being able to share their knowledge about foreign culture with friends and family. This discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative results may be due to the relatively
small sample size of the study abroad group, which may not have been powerful enough to provide statistically significant results.

Lastly, Nash’s (1976) research focused on changes in the self-realization of students who participated in study abroad experiences (n = 47). He found a significant increase in the differentiation of self for students who studied abroad between pre- and posttest, but not for those in the control group. Contrary to the researcher’s expectations, and rather surprising in light of the overwhelming evidence to support the identity development of students who study abroad, the Rosenberg Self-Evaluation Scale in Nash’s (1976) study showed a significant decline in self-confidence for students who studied abroad. Unfortunately, the assessment used to measure these changes was not adequately described, and the relevance of this finding is therefore unclear. It should also be noted that Nash’s (1976) study was conducted more than thirty years ago, and that findings may not be relevant for today’s study abroad programs.

Limited research is available on students’ comfort with their bodies and appearances while studying abroad. As described heretofore, Comp (2000) reported that students often gained weight and changed grooming habits while studying abroad. Beyond this study, little is known about this aspect of identity development. In addition, the research seemingly fails to address students’ comfort with their own gender and sexual orientation while studying abroad. However, in general, study abroad outcomes research provides strong support for the identity development of students who study abroad. Next, Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) sixth vector, Developing Purpose, is explored.
Vector 6: Developing Purpose.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) positioned the sixth vector, Developing Purpose, after Establishing Identity to reflect the central importance of identity development in career development. Progress in the first five vectors helps answer the question, “Who am I?” as the student learns about what talents, gifts, characteristics, behaviors, and roles define them. In order to develop purpose, the student must become increasingly intentional and take opportunities to assess interests, options, and goals. They must learn to persist and overcome obstacles.

In addition, the student must craft a vision of the desired outcomes for his or her life, and create a plan to reach such goals. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain that in order to develop purpose, the student must formulate a plan for action and “a set of priorities that integrate three major elements: (1) vocational plans and aspirations, (2) personal interests, and (3) interpersonal and family commitments” (p. 212).

In clarifying one’s purpose, one must go “beyond what is merely interesting and find an anchoring set of assumptions about what is true, principles that define what is good, and beliefs that provide meaning and give us a sense of our place in the larger whole” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 234). Since this process may take several years, students may only be able to offer a vague and idealistic definition during most of the collegiate years as they explore potential career interests. Chickering and Reisser (1993) believed that vocational interests may be discovered in unanticipated ways, such as through dating and socializing, taking elective courses, interactions with faculty, and (most relevant to the current literature review) travel abroad.
Several researchers have measured the career-specific outcomes associated with studying abroad, but few have focused specifically on evaluating changes in the vector, *Developing Purpose*, per se. Posey (2003), for instance, used archival data from the Florida state system database to explore the career outcomes of students who studied abroad, versus those who did not. He found a significant difference in degree attainment for these groups. Of all participants in his sampling frame who had studied abroad, 93.2 percent received an academic degree, compared to only 64 percent of the students who did not study abroad. Interestingly, the latter group had a higher mean wage at the time of the research study, when compared to those who had studied abroad. However, additional analysis revealed that this discrepancy may be explained by differences in participants’ degree programs.

Researchers have identified changes in career interests as an outcome of the study abroad experience. Helms and Thibadoux (1992) surveyed and interviewed 59 students who participated in a summer study abroad program, and found that students showed great interest in pursuing international careers upon return from the study abroad experience. Students were especially interested in short-term work assignments abroad, while some even expressed interest in expatriate assignments. However, major flaws in the research design (i.e., inadequate descriptions of sampling criteria, sample demographics, research methodologies, and hypotheses) make the significance of these findings unclear.

Research shows that students often change academic majors after returning from a study abroad experience. Reflecting such changes in career interests, a study by Gibson (1991) revealed that 60 percent of the study abroad participants that were interviewed for the research study changed their career choices dramatically, both in fields and emphases. Of these students,
two thirds changed their major to become an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, after studying abroad. Similarly, Zhai’s (2000) mixed methods study revealed that students who participated in study abroad (n = 21) were more likely to change career preferences than those in the control group (n = 77). These students also seemed more interested in future international careers. The majority of participants in the control group did not change educational or career goals.

In terms of occupational interest, Couper (2001) found that females who studied abroad (n = 59) showed a significantly higher interest in service-learning careers and arts, and significantly less interest in jobs that were individual-oriented, when compared to their female counterparts who did not participate in a study abroad program (n = 25). In addition, he found that males in this quasi-experimental retrospective did not reflect such differences. To reach these conclusions, Couper (2001) compared study abroad participants’ (n = 78) career goals to those of a control group (n = 48).

Other researchers have examined changes in the career-specific skills of students who study abroad. Norris and Gillespie (2008) explored the long term impact of study abroad experiences on the careers of 3,723 college students who had studied abroad with the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) between 1950 and 1999. Data from the IES’s retrospective longitudinal study conducted in 2002 was analyzed, and revealed that study abroad participation supported skill development that influenced participants’ career paths. First, foreign language competence was increased, which later proved useful for their careers. Second, career interests were clarified, which lead to the career direction that each participant ultimately pursued. In addition, the researchers identified particular elements of study abroad experience
found to be significantly correlated to the development of international careers, including: (a) year-long study abroad experiences, (b) participation in foreign internships, (c) living with host families, and (d) enrollment in courses at the host university that used foreign language instruction.

Respondents in Wallace’s (1999) study also reported gains in skill development that ultimately impacted their careers. The researcher used inductive qualitative methodology to identify themes and patterns within participants’ (n = 48) written and verbal narratives. The research results indicated that study abroad had a lasting impact on personal and professional growth for this group of students. Specifically related to career development, students reported that the study abroad experience developed their skills for vocation and avocation, solidified career interests, and strengthened foreign language skills used in future careers.

Researchers have made a connection between skill development during the study abroad experience and consequent goal setting. Pyle (1981) found that the newly developed skills and aptitudes resulting from participation in a study abroad experience may lead to the reassessment and redefinition of career goals and interests. The researcher analyzed data from the Student Developmental Task Inventory (SDTI) using t-tests, and found significant gains related to mature lifestyle plans in the experimental group, while there were no significant gains for the control group. The results indicated that students are exposed to new career options while studying abroad. Pyle (1981) explained that the many challenges associated with study in an unfamiliar culture - as well as successfully meeting those challenges - increased self-confidence in such a way that students are freed to confidently explore their environments.
Lathrop (1999) reported similar gains in goal setting. He used the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) to evaluate the career development of undergraduate students who participated in semester-long study abroad programs. The SDTLA included five subtasks related to Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vector of Developing Purpose, namely: (a) educational participation, (b) career planning, (c) lifestyle planning, (d) cultural involvement, and (e) emotional independence. The researcher found significant increases in career planning and educational participation for the experimental group. It seems that students gain interest in planning their future careers after studying abroad, and that they become increasingly focused on educational goals. However, insignificant results in the remaining subtasks of the SDTLA indicate that students may not gain emotional autonomy, interest in cultural participation, or interest in lifestyle planning.

In summary, there is overwhelming evidence to support the association between study abroad and movement along the sixth vector, Developing Purpose. Researchers have identified career-specific outcomes, changes in career interests and future goals, as well as career-specific skill development. In order to further the understanding of students’ career development, a brief discussion of the career developmental theories relevant to the collegiate years follows hereafter.

**Career Development Theories Describing the College Years.**

Several theorists have attempted to plot the natural progression of career development and occupational choice across the lifespan. The focus of the proposed research is on the traditional college-age years of undergraduate students, and the brief review that follows hereafter will therefore focus specifically on career developmental theories that offer insight into these years.
Ginzberg et al. (1951) and Donald Super (1972) posited that the years from adolescence into young adulthood is a time of career exploration, narrowing of career preferences, and career preparation. Ginzberg et al. believed that from age 17 into young adulthood (termed the realistic period), individuals move through three distinct stages of occupational choice: a) exploration, b) crystallization, and c) specification. This period corresponds loosely to Donald Super’s (1972) exploratory stage (said to occur between 15 and 24 years of age) which includes the tasks of: a) crystallization, (b) specification, and c) implementation.

The first of Ginzberg et al.’s (1951) stages, the exploration stage, begins around the age of 17 years, and typically aligns with students’ college entrance. It is characterized by the narrowing of career choices, paired with ambivalence and indecisiveness among choices (Zunker, 2002). Similarly, Donald Super (1972) believed that individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 years face the task of sifting through tentative career preferences and identifying a specific career preference (i.e., the task of crystallization). According to Super, students typically becomes aware of their interests, values, and resources prior to college entry, and have already formulated occupational goals before facing the task of specification.

Ginzberg et al’s (1951) second stage, crystallization, is characterized by the student’s commitment to a specific career. These theorists believed that pseudo-crystallization may occur if the student chooses to make a change in career direction (Zunker, 2002). Both Super (1972) and Ginzberg et al. believed that once the student has made a commitment to a career preference, he or she will engage in specific professional training or enter employment related to this career preference. Super called this the implementation task, while Ginzberg et al. termed it the specification stage.
Though the aforementioned theories differed slightly in the specific designation of career developmental stages evident during the collegiate years, both theories described similar developmental tasks during this period necessary for career maturation: (a) exploring different vocational options, (b) committing to a particular vocation, and (c) taking steps to prepare for the chosen career. To illustrate the connection between the aforementioned theories, a brief comparison of the career developmental tasks in Ginzberg et al.'s (1951) realistic period and Super’s (1972) exploratory stage appears in Table 2. As to these processes, Flum and Blustein (2000) believed that persons who engage in active career exploration are in a better position to construct “coherent career plans and a personally meaningful work life” (p. 380).

For Super (1972), the self-concept is the driving force behind establishing a mature career pattern and making a personally meaningful career choice. He is not alone in this focus on the self in career development. As discussed earlier in this review, Chickering and Reisser (1997) placed the vector Developing Purpose after the vector Establishing Identity to reflect the importance of self-understanding in career development.

Table 2
Tasks of the Realistic Period and Exploratory Stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Developmental Task</th>
<th>Realistic Period (Ginzberg et al., 1951)</th>
<th>Exploratory Stage (Super, 1972)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring different vocational options and interests.</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Crystallization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing to a particular vocation and career path.</td>
<td>Crystallization</td>
<td>Specification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking specific steps to prepare for the chosen career.</td>
<td>Specification</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linda Gottfredson (1981) placed similar emphasis on the self-concept, and deemed the individual’s orientation to their internal, unique self the most important challenge of the adolescent years and beyond. She believed that the self-concept is the product of the individual’s hopes, expectations, beliefs and views about the present and future self. It therefore becomes apparent that self-knowledge may be the driving force behind the career exploration, choice, and preparation of the college student – just as Chickering and Reisser suggested.

**Shortcomings of Previous Research**

Although there is a wealth of information regarding the psychosocial outcomes of study abroad participation, gaps in the research do exist. First, much of the study abroad literature that is most often cited in the field was published in the 1970’s and 1980’s (e.g. Carsello & Creaser, 1976; Kauffman & Kuh, 1984; Nash, 1976; Pyle 1981) when study abroad programs were gaining popularity (Thelin, 2004). Of all the literature reviewed, only three studies were published within the last five years, namely studies by Gillin and Young (2009), McCloud and Wainwright (2009), and Norris and Gillespie (2008). More current exploration into study abroad outcomes is therefore warranted to shape our understanding of the worth of these programs in an increasingly globalized society (Reimers, 2009, January 30).

Second, Laubscher (1994) opined that study abroad outcomes research mainly includes “guides, evaluations, general overviews, theoretical presentations, and general discussions” (p. 7), and fails to describe the processes that create change and foster development in students. The review of the literature heretofore bears testimony to this phenomenon. Much of the reviewed research has attempted to quantify students’ study abroad experiences through the use of various assessments (e.g. Carsello & Creaser, 1976; Herman, 1997; Nash, 1976; Pyle, 1981). Other
researchers have used qualitative methodology to uncover the thick descriptions of students’ study abroad experiences (e.g. Gmelch, 1997; Gibson, 1991; James, 1976; McLeod & Wainwright, 2008). However, both of these approaches limit the research findings to a mere description of the psychosocial changes that occur while studying abroad, while failing to explore the meanings and perspectives that informs such change. This creates a gap in the available study abroad outcomes research specifically related to psychosocial development.

A perfect example of this gap in the research is evident in Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) sixth vector, Developing Purpose. Several researchers have explored the career-specific outcomes of study abroad participation (see Helms & Thibadoux, 1992; Lathrop, 1999; Norris and Gillespie, 2008; Pyle, 1981; and Wallace, 1999). However, researchers have seemingly failed to explore the study abroad specific experiences that hold the most meaning to students’ career development in terms of career choice and professional identity development. The current research study focuses more narrowly on how students’ experiences and perspectives support development along Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors, and the ways in which development along vectors (including Developing Purpose and Establishing Identity) are interrelated.

Despite the insight into the collegiate years provided by existing career development theories, these theories are not intended to illuminate the specific career developmental processes of undergraduate students who study abroad, and therefore fail to fill the void in the literature. In addition, these theories are often strictly descriptive in nature, and therefore fail to offer explanations of the developmental processes involved, or specific strategies that could foster such development (Zunker, 2002).
Laubscher (1994) suggested that study abroad outcomes research should move beyond general descriptions toward explanation and understanding. Voids in research and theory identified in the literature review heretofore support the need for exploratory research in this field. Against this background, this study aimed to build a bridge from mere description of study abroad career outcomes toward uncovering the meanings and processes underscoring students’ lived experiences of such change and development.

This chapter served as a background to the current research study by offering a review of the literature relevant to the fields of study abroad and career development. More specifically, the chapter included study abroad outcomes research by Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors of student psychosocial development, as well as a discussion of the career development theories relevant to the traditional college years.

The next chapter outlines the proposed qualitative methodology of this study, including a description of the proposed population and sample, the role of the researcher, data collection procedures, strategies for enhancing trustworthiness and validating findings, data analysis procedures, and anticipated ethical issues.

Chapter four outlines the results of the study, and offers individual profiles of each of the participants. Major and minor themes that surfaced during analysis are also reported in this chapter. Chapter five contains a discussion of the findings of the research as they relate to the research questions. Overall conclusions of the research study are offered along with a discussion of the implications of the research findings for practice, research, and policy.
CHAPTER III

Methods

The following chapter describes the qualitative research design utilized in this study and includes information about the population and sample, the role of the researcher, data collection procedures, strategies for validating findings, data analysis procedures, and ethical concerns.

Research Questions

A review of the literature has revealed that much of the existing research in the field has attempted to quantify students’ study abroad experiences through the use of various assessments (e.g. Carsello & Creaser, 1976; Herman, 1997; Nash, 1976; Pyle, 1981), while others have used qualitative methodology to uncover thick descriptions of students’ study abroad experiences (e.g. Gmelch, 1997; Gibson, 1991; James, 1976; McLoud & Wainwright, 2008). However, both of these approaches limit the research findings to a mere description of the psychosocial changes that occur while studying abroad, while failing to explore the meanings and perspectives that inform such change.

To fill this gap in the existing body of research, the central research question that guided this study was, “What experiences and perspectives inform the psychosocial development [as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose] and career development (including career choice and professional identity) of undergraduate students who study abroad?” More
specifically, this study aimed to answer the following sub-questions: (a) What personal and career transformation occurs (or is perceived to occur) through the participation in a study abroad experience, and (b) how does the participation in a study abroad program impact career choice and life goals?

Qualitative research methodology was especially well-suited to answer the aforementioned research questions because it allowed the researcher to “investigate topics in their complexity, in context” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2), leading to thick, rich descriptions of the unique realities of research participants (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) explained that qualitative interviewing is a valuable method to explore issues which cannot be directly observed, such as the feelings, thoughts and intentions related to the study abroad experience, because it allows the researcher “to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Under the qualitative umbrella, phenomenology was especially well-suited to lead the inquiry into the perspectives and experiences of study abroad participants because this theoretical orientation seeks to uncover the “meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this…group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Through the phenomenological tradition, the research therefore aimed to find the “essences to the shared experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 106), which is the core meaning that the study abroad experience holds for students in terms of career and personal development, as understood mutually by all participants.

Phenomenology was introduced by Husserl (1913) to reflect his most basic philosophical belief that “we can only know what we experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 105) through our senses, and then describe, interpret and explain (Patton, 2002). Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) defined
phenomenology as “the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena” (p. 495). It is therefore retrospective, not introspective (Patton, 2002), which made it suited for the research questions under study.

**The Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the “key instrument” (Creswell, 2009), and “an integral part of the research process” (Marshall, 1996, p. 524). Research is interpretive, and through the process of reflective analysis that is characteristic of the phenomenological approach, “the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomenon being studied” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 472).

Gall et al. (2007) suggested that the phenomenological researcher should choose a topic that is engaging on both an intellectual and emotional level so that he or she will be invested in the research process. This investment in the topic is central to phenomenology, since the researcher “will be collecting her data on her own experience of the phenomenon as well as the experiences of her research participants” (p. 495).

My personal investment in the proposed research is, as suggested, both emotional and intellectual. Originally from South Africa, I participated in a year-long undergraduate study abroad to the United States several years ago, and it changed the direction of my life significantly. During my international study, I learned about myself while I learned about foreign cultures. The foreign environment allowed me to test different versions of myself, and this experience made me increasingly comfortable with who I was and who I wanted to be. The constant social, intellectual, and emotional stimulation challenged me to think about my place in
the world in a way I had never done before. Consequently, my career and personal goals became increasingly clear during this year, which I fondly remember as the best year of my life to date.

In the years following my initial departure from South Africa in exchange for the higher education opportunities of America, I have completed a Master’s degree and am currently pursuing a doctoral degree. These academic goals were not solidified prior to my participation in the study abroad experience, and serves as evidence of the impact of the study abroad experience on my personal career development. Against this background, I am excited to explore whether other undergraduate students have experienced changes in career and personal development during foreign study, and to share in their experiences retrospectively.

In addition to the aforementioned experiences, my background as a mental health counselor and state Licensed Professional Counselor has increased my personal investment in the proposed research, because it has sparked a passion in me for hearing others’ stories and exploring their unique realities. Through my part-time position as a graduate assistant in a campus career center, I have also had the great privilege of working with students as they explore career and life goals. I consider it an honor to share in the most inner worlds and lived experiences of the students I engage with during the counseling process. It is therefore not surprising that in designing the proposed study, I naturally gravitated towards qualitative methodology that would enable me to engage with students in ways that would reveal their most meaningful lived experiences.

In light of such deep personal investment, phenomenological research required the researcher to set aside personal assumptions in order to “describe things as they are, not as the participant (or researcher) typically, and automatically, interprets things based on past
experience” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496). It is therefore important that I briefly identify my personal assumptions that are relevant to the proposed study.

My first assumption was that individuals would have experienced some level of personal and career developmental changes while studying abroad, and that these changes would likely have been perceived by them to be largely positive in nature – as was the case with my personal experience of traveling and learning abroad. To guard against this assumption, I remained mindful throughout the study that my assumptions may be incorrect, and that some participants may not have experienced persistent change in personal or career development while studying abroad. For this reason, I remained open to each participant’s unique experiences and guarded against interpreting their stories based on my own personal experience of living and learning abroad.

My second assumption was that this change would be persistent, and that participants would be aware of such change. Alternatively, I assumed that they may gain awareness of such change during the interview process, which was designed to increase understanding. Though it may be that a participant was not in the frame of mind to think deeply at the time of the interview, my advanced training in personal interviewing facilitated the process of introspection and ultimately facilitated the awareness of change.

My third and final assumption was that participants would be able to articulate these changes as they explored their experiences retrospectively. Though this assumption proved false, by using the techniques acquired during advanced training in personal interviewing, I facilitated students’ exploration of past experiences so that they could articulate such experiences more clearly as the interview progressed. However, during the interview, I remained mindful that it
may not be possible for all participants to articulate past experiences well, regardless of the interviewing techniques used.

Relative to my assumptions, specific steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and to guard against researcher bias. First, phenomenological research utilizes the specific technique of “epoche” (Creswell, 2003, p. 52), Greek for, “to refrain from judgment” (Patton, 1990, p. 484). This technique enables the researcher to view the “phenomenon from several different angles or perspectives” (Merriam, 1998, p. 158). The second technique central to avoiding researcher bias in phenomenological research is “bracketing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 158), which requires the researcher to “bracket out the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusions” (Patton, 1990, p. 485).

The aforementioned processes were aided by my Counselor training. Establishing healthy boundaries is a critical component of effective helping skills (Corey, 2001). In essence, this training helped me to understand that my participants’ realities and stories are separate from my own. Per illustration, when students made comments that didn’t make them seem particularly academically focused (when I am highly devoted to academe), I understood that their priorities were different from mine yet equally valid (i.e., “bracketing” out my personal presuppositions), and I worked to suspend judgment (i.e., “epoche”). Additional strategies to reduce researcher bias are described more completely in the section, Enhancing Trustworthiness, which follows later in this chapter.

**The Population, Sample, and Participants**

Gall et al. (2007) suggested that the primary criterion for the selection of participants in a phenomenological study should be “that they have experienced the phenomenon being studied
and share the researcher’s interest in understanding its nature and meaning” (p. 496). Against this background, the chosen population was undergraduate students who have participated in at least one Study Abroad program while attending SU. The chosen sample was undergraduate students in their senior year of college who have participated in at least one Study Abroad program, for any length of time, to any destination outside of the United States, while attending SU. Senior year students of all majors and backgrounds were invited to participate, provided that their only experiences of living and learning abroad has been through participation in a study abroad program during college. Students who have experienced aspects of K-12 schooling abroad, or who have lived abroad prior to college, were excluded.

Participants were solicited using multiple methods. First, solicitation letters (see Appendix A) were placed strategically across campus in the Study Abroad Office, SU’s honor’s college, the International Studies department, buildings housing foreign language classes, and the Student Union. Second, key faculty and staff members within the aforementioned areas of campus were approached in person and via e-mail to raise awareness about my research and request referrals. These same individuals were approached to request a few minutes of classroom time in order to inform students directly about the research project. A total of five senior-level classroom visits were made during the course of one month. Third, a brief solicitation message was placed in the classified section of the SU daily on-campus newspaper for a period of one week.

Fourth, in order to reach the target population, a message was sent through electronic mail to current senior year students who had participated in study abroad programs during their college careers. E-mail addresses were obtained from the Study Abroad Office without student
names or other identifying information. The body of the electronic mail was a copy of a letter describing the research project (See Appendix A), and contained my contact information for those interested in participating in the study. Due to an inadequate response rate, a follow-up e-mail was sent to the same sampling pool after two weeks. This method did not allow any direct access to students’ information, which therefore protected students’ rights to privacy.

Once an interested student contacted the researcher, a response e-mail was sent describing the details of the study. Students were asked to complete a participant information sheet (Appendix B) in order to verify that they met basic selection criteria. This sheet was also used to gather demographic information. Self-chosen participant pseudonyms were used on this form to protect participants’ identities. Information sheets were either returned via e-mail or at the time of the interview.

As a final method of solicitation, I used snowball sampling - a method by which participants identified others who may have been able to further assist me in answering my research questions (Marshall, 1996). A question asking for such a referral was included in the final interview protocol (see Appendix C). Once a referral was made, an electronic mail describing the research project was sent to the student with a request for their participation. A follow-up e-mail was sent two weeks later in the case of an inadequate response rate. Students were encouraged to refer individuals at any time throughout the life of the research project.

Besides these traditional word-of-mouth referral methods, I also utilized social networks during the snowball sampling process. Browne (2005) opined that personal networks can be a successful way to gain initial contacts by asking friends and simple acquaintances to aid in the referral of research participants. Quite simply, friends and associates were encouraged to ask
senior year students at SU who have studied abroad if they would be willing to participate in the study. Such requests were made either in person, via electronic mail, or via the social networking site, Facebook. Friends and associates of the researcher were contacted in person, as well as through electronic mail and Facebook to initiate the snow ball. The researcher used the “status” updates of her Facebook account to further encourage referrals from friends in her social network.

Browne (2002) successfully used social networking to recruit a ‘hidden’ group in society for a doctoral study that focused on sensitive information. However, I believe that Browne’s strategy may be equally, if not more, effective with groups that are not hidden (i.e., study abroad participants), and with subject matters that are not highly sensitive in nature (i.e., career and psychosocial development).

Browne (2005) believed that this method gives the researcher access to individuals who would otherwise not have answered advertisements. Because the ‘snowball’ in essence begins with the researcher, Browne (2005) believed that the researcher becomes embedded in the social network, giving participants an opportunity to assess both the research and the researcher prior to making a decision about participation. Browne (2005) warned that snowball sampling may be a biased sampling technique due to the lack of random selection and the fact that participants are selected based on the social network they belong to. For this reason, Browne’s snowball sampling strategy was not chosen as the sole method of sampling. Instead, the researcher utilized the multiple solicitation methods outlined above in order to ensure that a variety of groups and individuals were reached.
Site Selection

The research site, SU, is a large 4-year public institution in a small-town location in the Southeastern United States. The Carnegie Classification for this co-educational institution indicates that SU enrolls at least 10,000 undergraduate degree-seeking students during the fall, with at least 80 percent of those students enrolled full-time level, and no more than 20 percent of incoming students transferring from other institutions (http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org). The Carnegie Classification further describes the admissions process at SU as selective, with freshman students’ test scores falling roughly in the middle two-fifths of all baccalaureate granting institutions.

Related to study abroad, SU institutional records indicated that 17.5 percent of 2008 graduating class had participated in study abroad programs while seeking a Bachelors degree. Institutional reports for 2008-2009 indicated that the greatest participation in study abroad occurred in Liberal Arts (31%), Accountancy (22%), Business (19%), and Applied Sciences programs (14%), while Engineering and Education saw ten and six percent participation respectively.

Study abroad opportunities at SU vary yearly, based on the feasibility of programs and student interest. During the 2008-2009 academic year, study abroad programs were offered to the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Belize, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, St. Croix, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.
Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect rich, descriptive data. An interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews was developed according to the guidelines offered by Creswell (2007). Data collection started with an initial interview using the 14 interview questions included in Appendix D. When the first interview revealed interesting personal changes post study abroad, the interview protocol was adapted to include an additional question to elicit this information from all participants. Cousin (2009) confirmed that questions may be amended as interviews reveal to be necessary. The final interview protocol used in the study is included in Appendix C, and included 15 questions. Interview data was recorded via a digital recording device, and was transcribed for further analyses.

Interviews were conducted after students had returned from studying abroad, because, as Shannon (1995) suggested, “students seldom realize how much they have assimilated from a new culture until they are home again” (p. 102). In addition, the phenomenological approach required research participants to reflect on lived experiences that they have already lived through, and the approach is therefore retrospective, not introspective (Van Manen, 1990). Jones (1985) explained the value of interviews as follows:

In order to understand other persons’ constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them…and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and a priori by ourselves) and in depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings. (p. 46)

However, Creswell (2009) warned that interviews also create several limitations to the study, including: (a) indirect data that it is “filtered through the views of interviewees” (p. 179),
(b) data that are often collected in an unnatural setting, (c) influences of the researcher’s presence on participants’ responses, and (d) variation in the ability of participants to articulate and reflect upon their responses.

Interviews took place in an administrative office centrally located on the SU campus. Once participants arrived, they were asked to choose a pseudonym that held no personal meaning to them in order to safeguard their identities. A short list of potential pseudonyms was provided to students who were unable to identify an appropriate pseudonym for themselves. The researcher made certain that chosen pseudonyms did not include the names of any students who participated or had shown interest in being a research participant. Participants used their pseudonyms on the student information sheets, and they were addressed by their assumed names during the interview. Before the interview commenced, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form granting permission for the interview to be audio recorded (See Appendix E). Their $5 Smoothie King gift cards were handed to them at this time, and they were made aware that they could stop the interview at any point and keep the gift card as a thank you for their time. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, followed by a short debriefing. Participants were interviewed only once, and follow-up interview where deemed unnecessary.

**Enhancing Trustworthiness and Validating Findings**

To obtain qualitative validity, the researcher is required to verify the accuracy of research findings (Patton, 2002). Several strategies were therefore utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and data analysis processes, including: member checking, clarifying the bias, and using two peer debriefers and an external auditor.
**Member Checking.**

Member checking involved granting research participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of information during various stages of the research process (Creswell, 2009). First, participants were asked to verify the accuracy of the transcribed interview and to clarify meaning, where necessary. Second, participants were provided with an opportunity to review the emerging themes and the final report (Creswell, 2009). Finally, all participants were invited to attend a public presentation of the research that took place on May 2, 2011. Although only one participant was able to attend, several others sent messages of support and good wishes in their absence.

**Clarifying the Bias.**

Several steps were taken to clarify any potential bias in the research in order to further increase the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2009). As Creswell (2009) suggested, comments were included to describe how my personal background may have shaped the findings of the research, and how my expectations or assumptions may have influenced (or biased) the research process. I started by clearly articulating my biases and assumptions - as described earlier in this chapter, in the section, *The Role of the Researcher*. I continued to pay attention to my personal reaction to the research through the use of written and audio recorded research journals throughout the life of the study.

Gilbert (2002) believed that keeping a record of key research decisions, personal reflections and emerging ideas during the research process may help the researcher to gain analytical distance from the research, thereby reducing bias. Similarly, Patton (2002) believed that creating an audit trail through journaling not only increases objectivity, but also assists with
the validity and reliability of the study. Journaling was particularly helpful in supporting my understanding of the data and emerging themes. As I read statements of participants, I was careful not to take them at face value, but to raise the question of deeper connections. I explored and made sense of these connections in the research journal entries.

I also guarded against any tendencies to ignore participant data that may have been negative or discrepant during the course of the research study (Creswell, 2009). Instead, I provided a rich, thick description of all data to “transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experience,” making the results “more realistic and richer” (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). I also discussed such discrepant evidence under relevant themes. In particular, my positive views of study abroad had to be put aside (i.e., “bracketing” out my personal presuppositions) to fully understand the unique realities of my research participants, and to recognize that their experiences were not always positive – yet equally valid (i.e., “epoche”). As a result, care was taken to present both positive and negative experiences and perspectives in the research findings.

Bias was further minimized by utilizing peer debriefers and external auditor, who verified the research processes and raised questions or concerns about potential bias. In addition, the dissertation advisor challenged the emerging themes and required that I reconsider the data in fresh ways. For instance, when my writing seemed to paint an overly positive picture of the research findings, the dissertation advisor challenged me to set a more realistic tone by paying adequate attention to discrepant cases as well. A brief discussion of the roles of the peer debriefers and external auditor follow below.
**Peer Debriefers.**

In order to further enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the help of two peer debriefers were enlisted: Dr. Amy E. Mark (Information Literacy and Instruction Librarian, and Associate Professor at The University of Mississippi) and Dr. Casey Cockrell (Career Placement Specialist at The University of Mississippi). Peer debriefing is a relational tool which further enhances the researcher’s awareness about his or her position toward the data and the associated analysis, helps clarify biases that are beyond awareness, and provides an opportunity for hypothesis testing and emotional catharsis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is defined as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).

Both Dr. Amy E. Mark and Dr. Casey Cockrell hold Ph.D.’s in Higher Education Administration from institutions in Mississippi, and therefore possess a thorough understanding of the qualitative research process and the field of higher education. The fact that neither had participated in study abroad experiences during college increased their objectivity and provided an outsider’s perspective to the research questions. Dr. Cockrell’s input was strongest during the research proposal stage, during which time she offered suggestions for ways to enhance the literature review and to prepare for the proposal defense. Post proposal, she expressed interest in the data collection process and the emerging common themes. However, as the project progressed, Dr. Cockrell’s demanding schedule unfortunately limited her time and further involvement in the research.
Dr. Amy E. Mark’s guidance started during data analysis and extended throughout the life of the study. She continually gave invaluable input about the data and themes, raised questions to further my unbiased investigation of the data, offered practical writing strategies, and made recommendations about how to improve the research. Her position in library administration added a professional perspective from within the field of higher education. Most significantly, Dr. Mark helped humanize the dissertation process and calmed fraying nerves during the writing of the final chapters and while preparing for the dissertation defense.

*External Auditor.*

The assistance of an external auditor was acquired as a last strategy to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Dr. Linda Keena is the Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at The University of Mississippi. She holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from The University of Missouri, and is particularly knowledgeable in qualitative research methods. Dr. Keena’s expertise lies outside of the field of Higher Education and she has never participated in a study abroad program. She was therefore able to objectively assess the project throughout, looking for accuracy in transcriptions and themes, among other things. Dr. Keena gave invaluable input throughout the life of the study in order to ensure an unbiased and ethical research process. Her comments with regards to presenting participant major and minor academic areas of study without being identifiable were particularly valuable. As a result, information presented in tables 5 and 6 were changed to better protect participants’ identities.

*Additional Strategies To Validate Findings.*

In addition to the aforementioned strategies to enhance trustworthiness and to support the validity of self-report interview data, interview questions were phrased unambiguously. In the
instance that questions were confusing, care was taken to rephrase the question in less formal language so that participants would fully understand the intended meaning of the question. Interview questions were posed in an environment where participants were encouraged to formulate answers thoughtfully and were made aware of the serious nature of the interview process (Kuh, 2004). Care was taken to ensure that interviews were free of threat or risk of harm, and participants were encouraged to respond to interview questions in any way they feel fit – whether socially acceptable or not (Kuh, 2004).

According to Gibbs (2007), qualitative reliability indicates consistency in the researcher’s approach across different researchers and projects. Even though the research involved a single process and researcher, certain reliability procedures were put in place to protect the soundness of data. As suggested by Creswell (2009), care was taken to: (a) verify the accuracy of transcripts to avoid obvious errors, and (b) define codes fully in order to avoid “a drift in the definition of codes during the process of coding” (p. 110).

Data Analysis Procedures

The focus of data analysis and interpretation was not generalization or causation. Instead, I hoped that the research would provide, as Manning and Stage (2003) suggested, a “richer account of human action” (p. 22). Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, described data analysis as, “sifting out intrusive phrases void of meaning…exposing and eliminating errors which here too are possible, as they are in every sphere in which validity counts for something” (Husserl, 1931, p. 256). In accordance with the phenomenological approach, reflective analysis strategies were used to analyze the interview data. According to Gall et al. (2007), “reflective
Cousin (2009) suggested several principles for the reflective approach that were followed during the research process. First, data was transcribed and analyzed immediately following each participant interview (Cousin, 2009). Creswell (2009) stressed the importance of thoroughly reading the transcribed interviews in order to gain a general understanding of participants’ experiences. Consequently, to maximize my familiarity with the data, I chose to personally transcribe each of the interviews. However, in light of an overwhelming interest in the research study, it was decided in consultation with the Dissertation Chair and the External Auditor to enlist the help of a transcriptionist. The interviews were divided equally among the researcher and transcriptionist. Those interviews not transcribed personally were read thoroughly to ensure comparable familiarity with all data.

To further support reflective analysis, Cousin (2009) suggested the use of an inductive approach to lead data analysis. Patton (2002) described this approach as an “immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes and interrelationships” (p. 41), beginning with exploration (not hypotheses) and ending with a creative synthesis of the data. In essence, inductive design requires the researcher to allow patterns and multiple interrelationships among data dimensions to emerge without presuppositions (Patton, 2002).

The first step to interpreting meaning in reflective analysis was to gain a thorough understanding of each individual case (Patton, 2002). To achieve this objective, each interview transcript was read and reread thoroughly, paying particular attention to those interviews not personally transcribed. Next, individual interview data was informally summarized and broken
into smaller units, which included meaningful quotes or personal anecdotes. Summaries served as a framework for crafting thick description of each participant’s experiences (i.e., participant profiles) (Patton, 2002). Such profiles explored information related to the participant’s age, race, major, and initial motivation for studying abroad. These summaries created a “textural description” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496) of the phenomenon, which is defined as “an account of an individual’s intuitive, pre-reflective perceptions of a phenomenon from every angle” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496).

Meaningful quotes and personal anecdotes from each participant were evaluated and compared across all participants (Patton, 2002) to identify emerging themes, thereby creating a “structural description” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496) of the phenomenon. The latter is defined as “an account of the regularities of thought, judgment, imagination, and recollection that underlie the experience of a phenomenon and give meaning to it” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496).

Emerging themes were reviewed in conjunction with existing theory and relevant literature in the field in order to reduce researcher bias (Cousin, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). As a final step to guard against personal bias during reflective data analysis, I continually guarded against my own biases and purposefully explored evidence that could both confirm or disconfirm my assumptions (Cousin, 2009). These data analysis strategies are general in description because the subjective nature of reflective analysis makes it impossible to precisely stipulate standard procedures to be used for such data analysis (Gall et al., 2007).

**QSR NVivo Software Package.**

Bazeley (2003) believed that computerized software packages can be used to enhance the research process because it aids in the management of large quantities of unstructured data, and
helps the researcher to derive meaning units more easily in order to communicate findings more clearly. Accordingly, QSR NVivo 9.0 Software Package was used to aid in the data analysis of this research study.

QSR’s software packages are used worldwide and considered by many to be one of the more sophisticated qualitative analysis packages available today (Weitzman & Miles, 1995). NVivo was designed specifically to facilitate the construction of relational networks that identify both the content and structure of participants’ responses (Richards, 1999). Bazeley and Richards (2000) explained that NVivo organizes data by using the document and node as central organizing concepts. The document contains textual data, while nodes represent specific ideas which may be linked to particular passages in the text during the coding process (Brazeley & Richards, 2000). Ultimately, a tree-like structure is developed that illuminates the relationships between nodes, which can be further broken into parent, child, grandchild, or sibling nodes to illustrate complex relationships (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). These interlinking networks help the researcher to identify relationships between emergent shared themes, thereby making the bulk of complex transcript data more manageable (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

In addition to these useful features, NVivo allowed unprecedented levels of transparency within the research project, because external reviewers and supervisors were able to view the source data, the processes involved in decision-making (including browsing of the data, memo & journal writing, and coding structures), and what actions were taken regarding the data (Johnston, 2006).
Anticipated Ethical Issues

Before starting any data collection, approval was sought from the dissertation committee. Thereafter, SU’s Institutional Review Board reviewed the research proposal to “ensure that the rights of research participants to confidentiality and freedom from harm are protected” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 55). Participants were at low risk of harm throughout the duration of the study.

Several methods were put in place to protect the individual’s right to decline participation in the research study. By having interested students initiate contact, anonymity of the sampling frame was assured. Identifying information was only obtained if the individual chose to provide such information during their initial contact. Participants chose their own pseudonyms prior to the commencement of the interview in order to safeguard their identities and to protect their right to confidentiality throughout the research process. To guard against potential conflicts of interest, the researcher refrained from interviewing any persons personally known prior to the commencement of the study.

Participants were informed of any potential harm and benefits at the beginning of the interview process. They were asked to sign an informed consent form (See Appendix E) prior to the commencement of any research. Participants were made to understand that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that they could refrain from answering any of the questions that made them uncomfortable. Participation in the research was encouraged by providing each participant with a $5 Smoothie King gift voucher. Participants were informed that they would receive this small token of gratitude for their time even if they chose to withdraw from the study.
The researcher was aware of the possibility that interviewees may have had unpleasant experiences while studying abroad, potentially leading to emotional distress while discussing such experiences. It was not outside the realm of possibility that a participant may have recalled a traumatic experience involving, for instance, a robbery or assault while abroad. In these circumstances, referral information was on hand for a contact person at the campus Counseling Center. In addition, participants were assured that their confidences would be held, and that their stories would contribute to knowledge and programs that may assist other students who will participate in future study abroad programs.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the proposed qualitative research design appropriate for this study, and included information about the population and sample, the role of the researcher, data collection procedures, strategies for validating findings and enhancing trustworthiness, data analysis procedures, and anticipated ethical issues. The next chapters report and discuss the results of the study, including major and minor themes that have surfaced during analysis. Finally, the overall conclusions of the research study are presented, along with implications of the research findings for practice, research, and policy.
CHAPTER IV

Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the psychosocial and career development of undergraduate students who study abroad through programs offered at a large 4-year public institution in the Southeastern United States. The study utilized the phenomenological approach to identify the essences of students’ study abroad experiences that were most meaningful to career and personal development.

The study was driven by the following research question: What experiences and perspectives inform the psychosocial development [as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose] and career development (including career choice and professional identity) of students who study abroad? More specifically, the research addressed the following problems: (a) What personal and career transformation occurs (or is perceived to occur) through the participation in a study abroad experience, and (b) how does the participation in a study abroad program contribute to the development of career choices and life goals? This chapter offers a summary of the research findings, including participant characteristics and profiles. Additionally, the major and minor themes that were discovered in the study will be addressed.
Participants

Data for this study was gathered from 40 current senior year students in their fourth or fifth year of study at Southeastern University (SU). Of the 40 participants, 23 were female, and 17 were male. All participants had studied abroad at least once during their academic careers at SU, had completed K-12 schooling in the United States, and did not study abroad before attending college. At the time of their interviews, participants ranged between the ages of 20 and 23 years. Participants claimed residence in regions throughout the United States, though 19 of the participants were in-state students, meaning they were from the State where SU is located. Participant demographic characteristics and personal profiles follow hereafter.

Participant Characteristics.

Demographic data was gathered from each participant prior to the interview using the student information sheet (see Appendix B). This sheet requested information about each participant’s age, ethnicity, degree program (including majors and minors), academic standing, home state and details regarding their study abroad experiences. Additional demographic information such as race and gender were collected during the interview.

Participants chose their own pseudonyms before the audio recording of the interview commenced, though they were encouraged to use names bearing no personal significance in order to effectively protect their identities. Pseudonyms were used consistently throughout of the life of the study. Henn, Weinstein, and Foard (2009) warned that although the use of pseudonyms helps to avoid the identification of individual participants, researchers should be extra vigilant by excluding additional identifying information, including geographic locations. Consequently, the home state information of participants was removed and replaced with a
broader categorization based on one of six United States regions (http://usa.usembassy.de/travel-regions.htm). The classification of each State by region may be found in Appendix F.

Participant demographic information is displayed by gender in Tables 3 and 4, which also introduces participant pseudonyms. As evident from Table 3, the 23 female participants ranged in age from 20 to 22 years at the time of interview, with a mean age of 21 years. The majority of female respondents identified as Caucasian (91.3%), while one participant identified as African American (4.3%) and one identified as Hispanic (4.3%). Of the female participants, only two were considered 5th year seniors (8.7%). The majority (91.3%) was considered 4th year seniors. When considering geographic information, female respondents came to college from five of the six United States regions. Seventeen female participants resided in states located in the South (73.9%), while 7 of these considered home to be the state where SU is located (indicated by an asterisk in Table 3). Two female students resided in the Western region, while two resided in the Midwest, one claimed came to SU from the Mid-Atlantic, and another from the Southwest.

Table 4 pertains to the demographic information of the 17 male participants, who ranged in age from 21 to 23 years. The mean age of male respondents was 22 years old. Of these students, 12 were considered 4th year seniors, while five were 5th year seniors. Of the seventeen male participants, fourteen identified as Caucasian (82.4%), and three as African American (17.6%). When considering geographic location, only three of the United States regions were represented by male participants. Twelve of the male respondents (70.6%) claimed residence in the state where SU is located (indicated by an asterisk in Table 4). Two more students resided in other states in the South (totaling 82.4%), while came to SU from the Midwest, and another from the Southwest.
Table 3
*Personal characteristics of female participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Regional Affiliation</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Midwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5th year senior</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
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<td>4th year senior</td>
<td>South*</td>
</tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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* Participant’s state residency is the same as the state where SU is located.
Table 4
*Personal characteristics of male participants.*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
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<td>South*</td>
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<td>Mike</td>
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<td>4th year senior</td>
<td>South</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>4th year senior</td>
<td>South*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Participant’s state residency is the same as the state where SU is located.

When considering male and female participants together, the mean age of research participants in this study was 21 years old. Female participants were in a slight majority, representing 57% of the sample. Thirty-five participants identified as Caucasian (87.5%), four as African American (10%), and one as Hispanic (2.5%). The majority of participants were considered fourth year seniors (82.5%), with only seven participants in their fifth and final year.
of study. When considering geographic location, the vast majority of participants (77.5%) considered the South home, with nearly half of these (47.5%) being in-state SU students. Four students came from the Midwest, two from the Southwest, two from the West, and one from the Mid-Atlantic. Five of the six regions of the United States were therefore represented in the sample.

Participants in this study were pursuing a wide variety of majors and minors, with some common pursuits among participants. Tables 5 and 6 list participants’ majors by gender. Of the forty research participants, slightly more than half (52.5%) were studying at least one foreign language as a major or minor academic interest, including: Italian, Spanish, French, Latin, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, and German. The most common degree programs among participants were International Studies (n=9) and Public Policy Leadership (n=4).

Among female participants, two students were pursuing triple majors, eight double majors, one triple minor, and one double minor. Eight of the male participants were pursuing double majors, and one a double minor. The majority of participants (60%) did not identify themselves as high achieving. Only nine female participants and seven male participants reported being members of SU’s honors program.

Table 7 lists participants by academic discipline to further illustrate the breadth of academic pursuits among participants. Participants who are enrolled in more than one major may appear in Table 7 more than once. Among participants, one student is pursuing a major in the Formal and Natural Sciences, 17 students are pursuing degrees in the Humanities, 16 students are pursuing degrees in the Professional and Applied Sciences (with 8 students in the Business School), and 18 students are pursuing degrees in the Social Sciences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
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<sup>a</sup> Participant is pursuing a second major that is not listed in order to protect participant identities
<sup>b</sup> Details omitted per participant request and to promote anonymity
<sup>*</sup> Indicates that student is a member of SU’s honors program
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<th>Foreign Language</th>
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<sup>a</sup> Participant is pursuing a second major that is not listed in order to protect participant identities

<sup>*</sup> Indicates that student is a member of SU’s honors program
Table 7
Participants by academic discipline (only majors considered)

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<th>Discipline</th>
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<td>Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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**Details of Participants’ Study Abroad Experiences.**

Participants were asked to list the number of times they participated in study abroad programs, the academic year during which each foreign study took place, as well as the destination and duration of each study experience. Academic year refers to an institutional classification based on the number of academic credit hours a student held towards their chosen degree. These details are captured in Table 8 for female participants and Table 9 for male participants. Note that six participants completed internships abroad, indicated by the presence of an asterisk next to the study abroad destination listed in Tables 8 and 9.
Table 8  
*Details pertaining to the study abroad experiences of female participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman Year</th>
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<th>Junior Year</th>
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<td>South Africa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Ireland*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiley</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laney</td>
<td>Germany*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Madison</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Mary-Anne</td>
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<td>4 weeks</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Riley</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scout</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Participant completed an internship abroad
As evident in Table 8, the number of study abroad experiences during college ranged from one to four among female participants. In total, the 23 women completed 36 foreign study experiences in 20 countries. Most female respondents (60.9%), however, participated in a single study abroad program. Six women (26.1%) each completed two study abroad programs, two women (8.7%) studied abroad on three separate occasions, and one (4.3%) participated in four separate study abroad programs. Among female participants, only five (22%) completed one or more internships abroad. Host countries spanned six continents and included: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Belize, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, and Switzerland.

The length of each study abroad program for female participants varied from one week to a full year. Among female participants, foreign study during the freshman year was less common (21.7%) and of shorter duration, being a maximum of 8 weeks long. Each of the students who studied abroad during their freshman year participated in at least one other foreign study program during college. Studying abroad during sophomore year was slightly more common (30.4%) and of longer duration, ranging from three weeks to four months. The majority of female respondents (96%) studied abroad during their junior years. During this time, programs ranged from 1 week to a full year, though most female participants (56.5%) chose to study abroad for a semester or longer.

Table 9 describes the study abroad experiences of male participants. For this group, the number of study abroad experiences during college ranged from one to three. Most male respondents (64.7%), however, studied abroad only once. Five participants each (29.4%)
completed two foreign study experiences, and one male (5.9%) completed three such programs. Only one of the male participants (5.9%) completed an internship abroad. In total, the 17 male participants completed 24 foreign study experiences in 13 countries, spanning six continents.

Table 9

*Details pertaining to the study abroad experiences of male participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Destination</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

* Participant completed an internship abroad
Freshman study abroad was not common among male participants. Only one of the seventeen male respondents (5.9%) studied abroad during his freshman year for a two month period. This same respondent completed two additional foreign study experiences during his college career, making him the only male that studied abroad three times. Interestingly, equal numbers of male respondents participated in study abroad during their sophomore (64.7%) and junior (64.7%) years. Foreign study during the sophomore year ranged from 3 weeks to 5 months, while most in their senior year (41.2%) studied abroad for a full semester or longer. Host countries for male participants in this study are listed in Table 10, and included: Argentina, Chile, China, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Spain, South Africa, and South Korea.

Table 10 serves as a summary of the number of study abroad programs completed by each participant, as well as the number of countries where such programs took place. The total number of weeks abroad was calculated for each respondent based on the combined length of each foreign study experience that he or she participated in. When considering the study abroad experiences of all forty respondents together, participants spent a total of 630 weeks abroad completing 60 study abroad programs in 22 countries. Fifteen participants (37.5%) studied abroad multiple times, with six participants (15%) returning to the same country for a second or even third study abroad program. The remaining nine participants chose to pursue additional programs in a different host country. The total number of weeks participants spent studying abroad varied from 2 to 56 weeks, with a mean of 16 weeks.
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Table 10
*Study Abroad Program Participation.*
Annotated Narratives.

The participants in this study were all very passionate about their study abroad experiences. Many seemed to go to a distant place in their minds as they recalled their adventures and the friends they had made. Annotated narratives of each participant follow hereafter in the order they were interviewed. Narratives include a demographic description of each participant, a brief summary of his or her study abroad journey, and any revealing comments made during the interview process. Each annotated narrative begins with a specific comment that captures the essence of their experience.

Ariel.

“It gave me a positive outlook for the future and that maybe I’m not so screwed.” Ariel is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South who studied abroad twice during her four years of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. While in her sophomore year, Ariel completed a 2-month internship in Ireland outside of her major field of study. Ariel chose to study abroad because she was uncertain about her future and felt a need to explore other career options. She explained that this first professional experience in a corporate role helped her to clarify her career goals. “It really does make you learn about yourself. It helped me to figure out where I’d like to be and where I feel like I’d do best at.”

Ariel’s positive experiences in Ireland inspired her to study abroad again during her junior year. To her surprise, the socio-cultural environment of Northern Ireland posed many interpersonal challenges and she felt isolated at times. Overcoming these challenges helped her to gain confidence and the belief that she can overcome difficult situations. She shared the impact of this experience:
I think it helped me to grow up. I think it helped me to become okay with being on my own and graduating, and being okay with who I am as a person, being independent and having my own thoughts, and knowing what I want to do. It really made me feel like a stronger person. That I can go somewhere else that I’ve never been before and that I’d be okay.

Kallie.

“I just learned not to be scared to do anything, but to do everything.” Kallie is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the West in her fourth year of college pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. She chose to study abroad in order to add another country to her travel check-list, which was already 25 countries strong at the time of our interview. She traveled with her long-distance boyfriend and a best friend from SU. Her semester in Australia started off full of promise, but it was tragically interrupted due to the unexpected death of a parent. She was surprised by the support received from newfound study abroad friends. She remarked,

It just showed me how people who had only been my friends for a little while would be there for me. They brought me food over to the house. They brought cards. That’s what made me so close to them…we did everything together.

After briefly returning to the United States for her parent’s funeral, Kallie rejoined her peers in Australia to complete her study abroad adventure. She traveled often and lived by the motto, “You will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than the things you did do…” Kallie’s priorities were clear, and she often missed classes to go on big adventures. “Do whatever you want to do at that moment, because you are going to remember that. You are not going to remember the B you got on a test,” she explained.
Lauren.

“I’m more confident in the classroom [and] when I do work now, knowing that I can do it.” Lauren, a fourth year senior from the South pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences, sought a study abroad experience in England to challenge herself to meet new people outside of her familiar environment. As a 21 year-old Caucasian female traveling abroad for the first time by herself, she was overwhelmed for the first few days. She shared this experience:

You’re basically just thrown into a situation where you don’t know anybody, you feel lost, and you have to adjust into the situation…You think you know what you’re going to act like and what the town is going to be like, but it’s completely different.

However, she soon gained confidence in her abilities to handle unanticipated situations. “Being in a situation where you don’t know what you’re doing and you don’t know what to expect, you have to be confident in yourself and in the decisions that you’re making. You just have to be.” This confidence carried her through many more unexpected challenges as she backpacked across Europe with two friends. She described the trip as her most memorable experience:

We just had the worst and best four weeks of our life. I’ve never had so many blisters on my feet. You just can’t prepare for it. It was fun and amazing, but it was hard work and it took a lot of skill of pleasing everybody, saving money, and figuring out where you want to go.
Annie.

“It made me a lot more open-minded.” Annie, a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the Midwest pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree with a triple major in the Social Sciences and Humanities, studied abroad four times during her four years of college. She first spent a month in Ecuador during freshman year to develop her Spanish skills. Though she reflected on this experience fondly, she also recalled how difficult it was for her to be separated from familiar personal relationships. Annie explained:

I am from a large family and I’ve always really been surrounded by people. Whenever I got to South America, I had a lot of alone time because I stayed with a host mother and she worked all day. That was something that was very different for me. It was kind of a challenge for me to entertain myself and be alone like that. I definitely am a lot more comfortable with that.

When Annie found herself without summer plans after her sophomore year, she took the opportunity to complete a 3-week elective course in England. She followed that experience with a 5-week study abroad program in South Africa during the same summer, this time for her major. Finally, Annie gained the confidence to embark on an independent 2-week study abroad in Belgium during her junior year to focus on her thesis research. She believed that the combination of study abroad experiences helped her to be open to other’s opinions and ways of life. In her words:

I did grow up in a very small town and I do live in a very conservative area of the US. I think that sometimes I’m not necessarily exposed to many different opinions as I have
been thanks to study abroad. I think that has definitely contributed largely to making me a more open-minded person.

**Rosa.**

“It made me more comfortable [that] the relationships would come. That is not something I had to work at anymore.” Rosa is 21-year old Caucasian female from the South in her fifth year of a Bachelor of Science degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences. She studied abroad in Scotland for a semester during her sophomore year because she desired a drastic change to help her out of the “sophomore slump,” as she called it. During her time abroad, she became very good friends with another female SU student whom she did not know prior. Rosa described this friendship as the most memorable part of her abroad experience because they shared many meaningful conversations about religion. This connection supported Rosa’s adjustment to the new environment away from friends and family. By Rosa’s account,

It’s just like understanding the joy in the connection and getting to share in a good, meaningful relationship. I feel like there can be relationships that just aren’t helpful. It is really interesting to see, looking back, who had made time and who I made time for. It really kind of showed me Wow! This person really does care about me.

Rosa was very dedicated to her classes abroad and took the opportunity to learn seriously. Her Latin class in particular posed quite a challenge because it was at a more advanced level of language skill than she had anticipated. With the help of a teaching assistant, Rosa read almost an entire textbook in her own time to reach the academic level of her classmates. As a result, her confidence in the language grew exponentially, and she added a minor in Classics with a focus on Latin upon her return to the United States. She described the challenge as follows:
It was good because I didn’t have as many distractions. We didn’t have a TV, we didn’t have all the rush stuff, and just other things that would pull you from doing that. I got to spend a lot of extra time doing that. That was great because I had to work on my end to understand.

Sarah.

“I feel I have matured so much and have grown as a person.” Sarah is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences. She studied abroad in Australia for a semester during her junior year with her best friend Kallie – who was also a participant in this study. The most challenging experience Sarah faced abroad was learning to console Kallie after her parent’s death, while simultaneously allowing herself time to grieve and to acclimate to her life abroad. She explained,

I would never have thought going on that trip that I would be going and helping [Kallie] buy her black dress for her [parent’s] funeral back in the States. It was so unreal. Just dealing with that [after] being there for a month, and still establishing myself, but also trying to help her…I had never been through something like that.

In the midst of this challenge, Sarah found comfort in a romantic relationship with an American student who she met abroad. They became engaged a few months after a long-distance courtship back home. This relationship was instrumental in her ability to understand and work through her own grief. Facing this and other challenges helped Sarah to mature and gain confidence in her ability to overcome unanticipated situations. She explained how this shift has affected her life back home:
So many people that have known me all my life say I’m a different person, in a good way. Taken in account studying abroad and all that went on, I’ve learned what’s important in life. I don’t get caught up in drama, petty fights, or gossip. I guess that comes with Kallie’s parent’s death and having a serious long distance boyfriend.

**Natalie.**

“I just feel like it all happened so fast.” Natalie is a 21 year-old, Caucasian female from the Southwest in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences. Her abroad adventure in Italy began as an impulsive solution to an uncomfortable junior year marked by academic burnout and strained friendships. For this reason, the focus of her study abroad experience had little to do with academic or career goals; she desired to have fun and live life to the fullest. Natalie connected with what she called a “fast crowd” who had the same singular goal of fun in mind. She described her most memorable experience as follows:

I think my favorite experiences were when I stayed in Florence, just going out on a Wednesday night just because. No reason, just because we had nothing to do, so why not go to our favorite bar and have some beer? Or just partying at the apartment. I guess the non-big things were my favorite moments.

Natalie remembers her time in Italy fondly. She explained that the experience of living care-free helped her to gain a sense of self in an unexpected way. She returned to America feeling matured and more academically motivated than ever before. However, she has had some difficulty readjusting to her life at home. She described her experience, “I feel like one day I
woke up in Italy, and the next day I took a plane home and woke up in my room. I don’t know why I never felt closure with study abroad.”

Kate.

“I think I learned who I was and came home okay with that, and comfortable and excited to make me a part of my life again.” Kate, a 21-year old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. Kate studied abroad twice - mostly because she has always had an interest in travel, but also because these specific opportunities were made possible through financial assistance. She studied abroad in South Korea for a month during her freshman year, and found the experience challenging because she lacked a thorough understanding of the history or context of the country. She explained that this lessened the impact of the academic experience and also limited her connection to South Korea. In Kate’s words,

I didn’t really relate to things in Korea or understand them because my knowledge of the place was pretty limited before I went. Without having lectures [about the culture] there, when we went to the Plant in Pusan it meant very little to me because I didn’t view if from the perspective of Korean economic development. I just viewed it from the perspective that we were there for 4 hours and I didn’t really understand why we were there.

When Kate studied abroad the second time, she purposely chose South Africa because of her interest in the country’s socio-historical context. Through her deep appreciation of the South African people and their culture, Kate was able to see her own family and her upbringing in a
new way that allowed her to accept her past. “I learned how to be more comfortable with myself and who I am, where I have come from, and the things that have shaped me leading up to now.”

Scout.

“I feel like if I were to go to Tokyo tomorrow, I think I’ll be fine. Before going to Costa Rica, I’d be more nervous than I would be now.” Scout, a 21 year-old Hispanic female from the West in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences, spent 6 weeks in Costa Rica during the summer of her junior year. She chose the particular program because she wanted a language immersion that would allow her to speak Spanish fluently and increase her comprehension. During her stay in Costa Rica, Scout gained confidence in her language skills and her ability to be self-sufficient. Scout explained:

Going there, I felt more independent. Even when I walked around, I didn’t need an adult or anything. I asked directions in Spanish. I didn’t understand, really, but I would try to catch words and I’d eventually figure it out. By the end, I could understand. It was just kind of good for my confidence.

Her confidence followed her home after completing her study abroad program, and she returned more academically motivated and goal-directed than ever before. She believes that the timing of her study abroad adventure was perfect,

To do it right before your senior year it’s like, I studied abroad and I have all this under my belt. Now it’s time for the last lap of the mile. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. It kind of pushes you a little bit. It motivates you. It’s like one of your goals is down, okay, I’m going to keep rolling with it. Once I studied abroad I figured out I could do something that big, and then you want to keep doing bigger and bigger things.
Elizabeth.

“I just felt so accomplished, so confident, and so motivated!” Elizabeth is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the Midwest in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences. Elizabeth studied abroad in Germany twice as part of the requirements for her German minor. First, she lived in Osnabruck for four weeks during the summer of her freshman year. Leading up to her departure, Elizabeth was very discouraged by her language learning ability and questioned whether it was even worth it to travel to Germany. Thankfully, her overwhelmingly positive experience in Germany reinvigorated her to such an extent that she declared herself a German major upon her return to the United States. She explained how the study abroad program helped build her confidence:

I don’t want to say that studying abroad changed my life because that is a very strong impactful thing to say. But I definitely was an enhanced person after I came back. I think I just know that if I can get through five hours of intensive German class with non-English speaking teachers, what can’t I do? I don’t know!

Two years later, during the summer of her junior year, Elizabeth completed a six-week internship in Frankfurt. She traveled completely independently and did not experience the predeparture insecurities that had marked her first study abroad experience. She was confident in that she would be successful once again. According to Elizabeth,

Going back this summer and doing it again, I had no idea what I was doing all by myself, but I knew that I could do it. I never had the doubt or the worry that I was going to fail at it. I knew that if I went through one experience and made it through, I knew that I could
do it. Studying abroad just gave me more of a can-do attitude about everything. I just
don’t shy away from opportunities now. I just think that there is a reward in everything.

Mary-Anne.

“I think every part of me is better for some reason or another.” Mary-Anne is a 21-year
old Caucasian female from the South in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration
degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences. When Mary-Anne realized that her college
career was soon drawing to a close, she looked at study abroad as a great opportunity to realize
her life-long dream of going to Europe. As a student athlete, her options for study abroad were
limited to a summer program, and she chose to go to England for four weeks during her
sophomore year. Reflecting on the experience, Mary-Anne said, “I have nothing but good
experiences, really, and nothing but good things to say about the program. Everything was just
wonderful, and I’m so happy I did it. I would do it again in a heartbeat. I really would.”

Though she reflects on her experiences in England positively, Mary-Anne did remember
a difficult encounter with a British man who confronted her about American gun laws. She felt
like she had to defend her American way of life, which was something she had not anticipated.
However, Mary-Anne found the experience valuable in that it made her aware of diverse views
and lifestyles. She described the significance of the experience as follows:

You’re just better in pretty much every aspect of your life. And especially in today’s
world, when everything is so global, if you don’t have these kind of experiences,
eventually you’re going to be considered ignorant. So you might as well get on board
now. Because you can’t just live in your own little world. You have to be aware.
Reed.

“It definitely humbled me.” Reed is a 22 year-old Caucasian male from the South in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in the Social and Formal Sciences. When Reed received funding to go on a study abroad adventure with his SU friends to South Korea during his sophomore year, he jumped at the opportunity. The program paired SU students with South Korean students as they traveled through South Korea and the United States respectively. Though Reed enjoyed the cultural exchange overall, he recalled a few uncomfortable situations that occurred while the two cultures learned to respectfully coexist in close quarters. Despite a few negative experiences, the moment Reed remembers most was a visit to a technology mall. The experience remains beyond his comprehension. Reed was inspired to incorporate the technology field into his future career goals one way or another.

After an unforgettable first experience studying abroad, Reed was inspired to see more of the world. He pursued a second study opportunity in South Africa during the summer of his junior year. Reed was moved by the country’s overwhelming poverty, and he experienced a shift in his understanding of his role as a future policy maker. In Reed’s own words:

You can’t go and see all these things in South Africa and come back saying the poor are faking it. You can’t. I’ve never been real sympathetic to the poor or the needy in other countries. That’s a major part of policy making, and I just know there are so many officials in the world that really would benefit from seeing what I saw. They need help. It makes you want to take action and be a part of making it better in their future.
Rachel.

“My goals have become more solid since I’ve been there.” Rachel, a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities, studied abroad three times during her four years of college in an attempt to build language skills. She studied abroad in Japan twice: first with a few of her SU classmates during the summer of her sophomore year, and again for a full semester during her junior year. In between the aforementioned sojourns to Japan, Rachel spent a semester of her junior year in Germany. She summarized the significance of these experiences as follows:

I learned a great deal about a wide variety of topics. From singing to what is helpful for me for language learning, to how I can live on my own, to navigate trains. I learned a great deal about a lot of different parts of life.

While abroad, Rachel felt as if her language ability and confidence grew exponentially. Though Rachel had aspired to be a language teacher for some time, her many sojourns abroad inspired her to focus on teaching English abroad for a few years after graduation. The language programs abroad also helped shape her personal teaching philosophy. By Rachel’s account:

I got much better at German. I could pick up something in German and read it, which was not necessarily the case when I went there. I could read a newspaper, or a novel. That made me feel more confident in language learning and more interested in being in foreign places and staying there.

John.

“I just realized there’s a lot more that the world has to offer.” John, a 21 year-old Caucasian male from the South in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration
degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences, chose to complete a two month internship at a world-renowned business corporation in Ireland during the summer of his sophomore year. The internship carried much responsibility, as he worked on a fund accounting team with international clients. “Although I was an unpaid intern, it was fairly significant work and they allowed me a lot of participation,” explained John. “Being able to put that on my resume and to know that I walked in there and did something significant and accomplished something was either the cake or the icing on the cake relative to being in Ireland.”

The experience of his first corporate job was exhausting, but highly rewarding. John returned to America with a noticeable increase in ambition, which he directed into adding a second major to his program of study. He explained the significance of the internship for his career and life goals as follows:

I want to come home tired and stressed, and feel like I did something that day. That I accomplished something and was noticed by superiors, that it was appreciated by teammates, that it was worth my time. I’m more ambitious, more interested in accomplishing things and doing things that are meaningful rather than just sitting around, enjoying college.

**Miriam.**

“My German improved tremendously!” Miriam, a 20-year old Caucasian female from the Mid-Atlantic, studied abroad in Germany twice during her four years of a Bachelor of Arts in the Humanities degree. She first accompanied classmates from the German major program on a language immersion program during the summer of her sophomore year. Miriam was glad to have familiar faces around her, though it was challenging at times to be with the same people
twenty-four-hours a day. When she chose to return to Germany for her entire junior year, she took her three-year-old child as companion. It was a special time for them – having only each other for comfort in a foreign country. Miriam explained:

Weekends were really good for us just because there was nothing else to do. In Germany, Sunday is just a family day and you just spend time with your family. We just had to be together. I definitely feel better about my ability to parent.

When Miriam was unexpectedly hospitalized for a month with a life-threatening condition, her mother flew abroad to assist. Miriam optimistically saw her time in the hospital as another opportunity to learn German vocabulary to which she would not otherwise have been exposed. She enjoyed being immersed in a foreign culture, and looks forward to many more cultural exchanges in her future. She described this change:

I don’t think I’m going to be satisfied anymore with staying in America for the rest of my life. That doesn’t necessarily mean that I’m going to move somewhere else for a year or five years or even a month. But even just traveling and just getting to see other people, and reaching out to internationals here. I think that’s going to be a much more important part of my life than it was before.

Randy.

“When you’re over there you think, ‘My world is a bubble.’” Randy, a 22-year-old Caucasian male from the South, is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration with a double major in the Professional and Applied Sciences and the Humanities. He studied abroad twice so that he could get enough Spanish credits to graduate with a major in Spanish. First, he studied abroad in Chile for one month during the summer of his sophomore year. He
explained that this experience felt more like a vacation than a study endeavor because he would spend most days on the beach, partying with friends. He greatly valued the social aspects of the experience. “If I did it by myself, didn’t meet anybody, or make relationships with anybody, it would have almost been for nothing for me.”

Randy’s second sojourn abroad was to Spain for two months during the summer of his junior year. He formed a great bond with his host family and spent most free time with them. Consequently, he felt like less of a tourist. Through the interactions with the people he met on his journeys, he learned a great deal about himself and the way that he views the world. He asserted,

There’s just so much more! I realized the way I live here, the things I do, how my everyday life is…it doesn’t mean it’s the right way. I don’t think there’s one certain right way to live a life. Just because it’s a different culture doesn’t mean it’s wrong. You see things differently. You’re not as judgmental.

**Eileen.**

“You believe in your own ability to get stuff done.” Eileen is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in the Social Sciences and Humanities. When she made friends with international students at a conference during high school, Eileen was inspired to study abroad. During her four years of college, she has studied abroad in China twice for language learning: once for three months during the summer of her sophomore year, and once for a full semester during her junior year. She explained what it was like adapting to life in a foreign culture:

It’s really fun and a little bit intimidating to try to bridge those culture gaps when you first get there because you have to understand what you can and can’t say. Americans are
very direct when they speak and Chinese are the opposite. They would never tell you “No,” they’ll just say, “Let’s talk about it later.” What they really mean is no, but they don’t want to say it. So it’s kind of a bizarre culture gap, but it is really exciting to go over there and try to fit in.

Eileen’s most memorable experience was when she was bitten by a dog while walking along the streets of China. It was a terrifying experience which caused her to have to undergo rabies exposure treatment for two months. Though Eileen could never have imagined this to be her fate during her Chinese sojourn, she advocated for what she called “mishaps” during the study abroad experience, because she it supports personal growth. She asserted:

I definitely think it’s worth it to have a few mishaps here and there. You know, to get lost in the city for an hour and have to get back on your own, or to accidentally tell a cab driver the wrong place and you have to figure it out. You can’t call mom. You have to get it together. It is important to help you reinforce your confidence in your independence.

Riley.

“I grew more than I can ever remember.” Riley, a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Art degree in the Professional and Applied Sciences. During the summer of her junior year, Riley traveled to Spain for a 10 week graphic design internship with a Christian ministry. She worked full time with an international team, and lived in an apartment above her office. Though she lived with coworkers, she did not make many close friends during her stay. She often experienced a great deal of loneliness, which created an unexpected opportunity for personal growth. She shared the significance of these experiences:
This summer was so beautiful in that loneliness because I got to dig back and go to past things that I never allowed myself to feel, and face being alone. I think I have always been scared to be alone, and out of this summer in Spain I got to face that fear. It has really changed me in many, many amazing ways. On my trip I found my voice. I got to just shine as me.

While in Spain, Riley volunteered with a homeless project in Madrid where she would help deliver food to people living in subway stations. Though she did not speak much Spanish, she fostered a meaningful connection with the homeless and found that gratitude and compassion transcends language barriers. These cross-cultural experiences helped her gain insight into life beyond her American reality. “Our world isn’t just centered on us. There’s so much out there going on,” she said. “It’s a much bigger story than just ours. Ours is a little story.”

Samantha.

“The more cultures you see, the broader your perspective.” Samantha, a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. She chose to study abroad to Spain for a semester during her junior year to hone her Spanish language abilities for her minor. Arriving in a Spanish speaking country alone was very intimidating. “The first day was just totally overwhelming, and the first 24 hours were just horrible. I didn’t know what anyone was saying.” Despite a challenging few days, Samantha adjusted well. She described the benefits of traveling alone as follows:

I felt sort of anonymous there - which can be good and bad. Here, I feel like everyone watches your every move, whereas there it was not quite the same, and it was a big city.
It was really freeing. We definitely all have the “what happens in Spain stays in Spain” sort of attitude.

It seems Samantha enjoyed gaining distance from the cultural expectations of home. She learned a great deal about Spanish culture through this immersion, and felt particularly encouraged by the different gender role expectations of Spanish females her age. She explained:

In the South, it’s normal and expected that girls are married or at least engaged by age 24 or 25. I used to think that was normal. In Spain, almost no-one would even think about getting married at 25 because that’s way too young in their minds. It was nice to know that somewhere else in the world, there’s not expectations and pressures to get married young.

Michelle.

“I am no longer stuck in one way of thinking.” Michelle, a 21 year-old African American female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts in the Sociology Sciences. When Michelle picked up a study abroad pamphlet as a freshman, she was enticed by the many pictures of SU students posing for pictures in distant lands. Then and there, Michelle made it a personal goal to study abroad while in college so that she could also be featured in one of SU’s study abroad pamphlets. Her dream was realized when an opportunity arose to take Spanish electives in Chile during the summer of her junior year. Though she traveled with a large group of SU students, she much preferred spending time with her host family. Michelle thrived on the cultural exchanges with local people. She described her passion for diversity as follows:

I rediscovered that I enjoy getting to know people different from myself. So many people just stay in their comfort zone, but I believe that no-one can grow to the best of their
ability inside their comfort zone. I got to understand their perspective of life. It’s not just about one race, one sex, or one religion. Absolutely not!

Michelle took great pride traveling to Chile as an African American, because she knows that not many students of her race participate freely in study abroad experiences. She found it interesting to be the only African American person in her Chilean town. Though her experiences in Chile were mostly positive, there were a few times when she felt as though people were treating her differently because of the color of her skin. She shared the significance of these experiences:

I got to experience what it feels like to really be in the minority – being the only black – and see what it is like to walk in someone’s shoes. I got to the experience of, “Oh, I look different. I’m not the same as everyone around me.” Because of that experience, I will consider the other perspective. I am less judgmental and less stereotypical of others. I try to be as inclusive as possible.

Pope.

“I’ve learned to enjoy life.” Pope, a 21 year old African American male from the South, is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities. When Pope studied abroad in France during the summer of his junior year, he had two goals in mind: learning French, and making memories to one day share with his children. He explained what achieving these goals has meant to him, “I’ve learned to have memories. Because looking at pictures is all I have, and that’s all I can share with my children and their children. That’s what life is all about. That’s all we have.”
Pope especially enjoyed spending time with his newfound friends from around the globe. They quickly learned that survival in a French speaking country required collaborating with one another and building on each other’s strengths. They learned in the classroom and out, even playing flash card games in restaurants to learn basic vocabulary. For Pope, it was this comfort with his fellow students and professors that made the experience most memorable. He remarked:

It’s something about people. They made the situation. Those students who really helped me when I needed them, and when they needed me… it was an amazing experience. We all brought something to the table, something good. I guess we have to rely on Facebook now, but it’s nothing like being around those people, laughing and crying and working with those people.

Jane.

“It was very hard being completely by myself [without] every little comfort I’ve ever had.” Jane, a 22 year-old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities. Having wanderlust for travel for as long as she can recall, Jane visited the study abroad office “on a whim” one day and decided to go to Australia for a full semester during her junior year. She had grand expectations for her Australian adventure, though she anticipated some difficulty being separated from her twin sibling for the first time. Jane remembered feeling blindsided when her adjustment in Australia was not as natural as she had imagined. She described how these experiences supported her development:

Sometimes you have to be stripped of everything that you know in order to really focus on growing as a person. It stripped me to a very small and open, vulnerable person. Now
I’m just learning how to climb back up. Growing as a person, and becoming the person that I want to be.

Though she felt sad most days while studying abroad, Jane found that pushing herself to do things outside of her comfort zone was a good distraction. She participated in a week-long adventure trip through Australia, where she did bungee jumping, amongst other things. She related this experience to embracing life without her sibling. “It kind of symbolized letting myself go and just not even thinking, and taking that risk and jumping into the unknown.” Though the study abroad was a big challenge for Jane, she feels it was worthwhile. She explained, “It is a challenge, but once you overcome the challenges, you feel so good! It’s done! It’s wonderful. And then you are this person who you never thought you would be.”

**Ross.**

“You learn the most when you are out of your comfort zone.” Ross, a 21 year-old African American male from the South, is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities. He looked at study abroad as an opportunity to experience other cultures, and chose to travel to Germany for three weeks during the summer of his junior year to pursue elective courses. He is very proud of the relationships he built with students from 11 different countries across the globe. Ross described being moved by interactions with them and by his experiences of being a foreigner in a non-English speaking country. He explained the significance of these experiences:

Once I returned from Germany it just instilled in me a drive to help international students because I was very uncomfortable in Germany. It was out of my comfort zone for three
weeks and they’re here for a whole semester. So, I’m going to try to make them feel as comfortable as possible.

Ross was most inspired by the level of career readiness of his classmates abroad, and he became serious about solidifying his career goals. Interactions with diverse individuals inspired him to pursue a degree in Higher Education Administration so that he may work with international students and campus diversity issues. Ross feels confident in his ability to be successful in the future, and ascribes this change to participation in study abroad. In his own words:

I learned if I put my mind to anything, I will excel in it. That’s one thing I feel like I really achieved in my personal growth. I learned that I can make it through just about anything. If you throw me into another country, I can survive.

Kevin.

“It’s all about the people you meet.” Kevin, a 21 year-old Caucasian male from the Midwest, is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. Kevin always hoped he would be granted the opportunity to participate in study abroad during college. Language immersion for his Italian minor turned out to be just the right excuse to warrant his participation in two study abroad programs: three weeks during the summer of his sophomore year, and a full semester during junior year. In Italy he went out of his way to seek out opportunities that allowed him to interact with native Italian speakers. He felt accomplished when he was finally able to communicate with relative ease. He explained:
By the end, you can hold a conversation with somebody in a different language, it blows your mind that there are other ways to express yourself other than in English. To be able to truly communicate with people from another world is something that’s pretty cool.

For Kevin, it was the interactions with people he met during the sojourn that truly made the experience worthwhile. Kevin believed that the many meaningful interactions with people different from himself gave him a new perspective about the world. He described his new perspective as follows:

It definitely opened my eyes that there are other things out there than America. That McDonald’s and Netflix and all that kind of stuff is great, but it’s not everything that’s out there. The world has a lot more to offer than what we see. Be open-minded.

**Kiley.**

“I learned that I’m capable. I don’t need people holding my hand to do anything.” Kiley, a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities. When Kiley found herself needing a change from her junior year at SU, she immediately grasped the opportunity to go to Argentina for a full semester. “I just needed something different,” she said. “I needed a new place. I needed new faces. I was down there just immersing myself in culture. I wasn’t thinking about my career at all. I was just having fun.”

Kiley thoroughly enjoyed her time in Argentina, spending many nights out in the local restaurants and bars with her newfound friends. She laughed while relaying stories of minor run-ins with the police while walking home alone after late night partying. Kiley certainly didn’t seem to mind the trouble. “All the officers are so good looking, like they’re all so hot and I’m just like, you can yell at me all you want. I’m just sitting here thinking about how hot you are!”
Though her time in Argentina was focused on carefree fun, she did learn a few valuable lessons from living in a poverty-stricken region. In Kiley’s own words:

I appreciate what I have more. I definitely understand why people are bitter towards Americans sometimes because we are wasteful people. I appreciate my country, but I’m glad that I can appreciate somebody else’s culture and their country just as much, too.

Ashley.

“It really opened me up to just getting out there and doing things.” Ashley, a 22 year-old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fifth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in the Professional and Applied Sciences and the Humanities. Ashley suffers from a severe and chronic stomach condition that is exacerbated by stress. Though she wanted to study abroad since her freshman year, Ashley postponed her departure due to concerns that travel would impact her health. After learning to manage her condition with medication, and with her parents’ unwavering encouragement, Ashley finally signed up for a summer study abroad in England during her senior year. Though the first few days in England were overwhelming, she stayed surprisingly healthy and was happy to learn just how much she enjoyed being in a foreign country. Ashley described the significance of this personal shift as follows:

All the experiences made me realize how much I want to travel everywhere. I actually did a [tour] this summer around Europe. It’s something I never would have done had I not done the study abroad because I was just so used to being home.

Ashley enjoyed the study abroad so much that, at the time of interview, she was in the process of applying for a post-graduation internship in England where she would be helping
others plan their sojourns abroad. If the internship does not materialize, she is determined to find something that will allow her to be overseas again. She shared her motivation:

It’s made me want to meet new people and made me much more open-minded about the world. There’s so much out there to see and experience. I want to see and experience it all. It’s definitely made me realize things about myself that I’d never realized before.

*Miguel.*

“It was just like information overload!” Miguel, a 21 year-old African American male from the South, is in his fourth year of Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. His major required at least a semester-long language immersion experience to build fluency, but Miguel knew he wanted to spend at least a year abroad so that he could also focus on narrowing his career options. He planned to study abroad in Ecuador for the year. However, when he was faced with the realities of a dangerous environment marked by racial intolerance of Afro-Ecuadorians, he chose to transfer to an institution in Mexico for the second semester. He explained how these experiences changed his perspective:

I looked like those people and they were discriminated against. I wasn’t discriminated against because they told me I was white. It was weird for me. I was like, wow! If I had been born here, I wouldn’t be able to get a job, I wouldn’t have an education, I would have to beg for money. It was crazy.

Miguel felt freed once he arrived in Mexico. With not many African people in the region he studied, Miguel did not experience discrimination as he did in Ecuador. He enjoyed the anonymity of what he called the “foreigner” identity, which allowed him more leeway and less guilt when making cultural faux pas. He found meaning through interactions with newfound
friends, and in some ways discovered his own culture as he became immersed in theirs. “People will tell you stuff about yourself and your culture that you never knew – good or bad,” he said. “It just makes you think!”

Laney.

“It just really inspired me to know what’s going on in the world.” Laney is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South in her 4th year of Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in the Social Sciences and Humanities. As a French minor, Laney recognized the importance of language immersion and chose to study abroad twice to gain language fluency. She first studied abroad in France the summer of her freshman year with several of her classmates, though she completed an internship in Germany before arriving in France. Unfortunately, a dear family member passed away while she was abroad, and it was an especially difficult time for her. “I’ve never had to deal with death up until then,” she explained. “To just be away from my family and learning how to grieve in a place that’s not home or comfortable or familiar, that [was] the most challenging. I learned so much.”

Though her freshman experience was bitter-sweet, she chose to pursue a full semester of study in Switzerland during her junior year. This time, she traveled without her SU classmates. Space from the familiar gave her an opportunity to reevaluate her life in America. She shared the significance of her time alone:

I got to take a step back. Without even realizing I was doing it [I was] reevaluating who I was, who I was in this community, how I was academically, who I was in my family, what type of friend I was, and what type of friend I wanted to be. It gave me time for myself.
**Belinda.**

“There was definitely a sense of isolation. You feel like an outsider because you are.” Belinda is a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South, in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. During her youth, Belinda was fortunate to be able to see a lot of the world with her parents. In college, she looked forward to participating in a study abroad program because it would give her an opportunity to spend an extended amount of time in one country, immersed in the culture. Belinda did just that during her junior year, when she studied in France for a semester to build language skills. “Getting to know a place and being able to close your eyes and walk through the streets just knowing exactly where to go is just a great feeling,” she said.

Completely captivated by French culture, including the world-renowned cuisine, academics were not Belinda’s primary priority. Newfound Parisian friends showed her a side of France that made Belinda thirst for even more traveling and adventure. She has since decided to travel abroad for a few years before graduate school to work on organic farms across Europe. Belinda explained this decision:

This is going to sound really bad, but it made me not care about school. I definitely did not go to class as much as I should have. I didn’t care about it. I was more interested in walking around town and grocery shopping. Just food and life is so much more important than school to me after studying abroad.

**Steve.**

“I was pretty much out of my comfort zone for three weeks.” Steve is a 21 year-old Caucasian male from the South in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration
degree with a double major in the Professional and Applied Sciences. Steve dreamed of an internship abroad during the summer of his sophomore year, but when he was unable to find one, Steve decided to take a two-week elective course in England with students from SU. He hoped that the experience abroad would build his resume and provide some go-to experiences to use during job interviews. Though he enjoyed the program overall, the experience remained strange to Steve throughout his stay. In his own words:

I wasn’t ever really comfortable. Even the bed wasn’t comfortable over there, you know? The food wasn’t comfortable. The only thing that was comfortable was the beer.

Operating out my comfort zone for three weeks at a time made me grow up a little.

He remembered feeling especially lost without a cellular phone. On one occasion when he felt endangered, he realized that he did not even know an emergency phone number to call for help. Though that was a more extreme example, Steve also felt the impact of isolation on his day-to-day decisions and actions. These experiences helped him learn “how to respond to unexpected situations, to make quick decisions when you don’t have a lifeline to call and ask somebody how to do something. If I wanted to make it happen, I just had to figure it out.”

Madison.

“The friendships that came out of that semester will go on with me forever.” Madison, a 21 year-old Caucasian female from the South, is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Though Madison’s major requires participation in a study abroad program, she did not need much convincing to live in Switzerland for a semester during her junior year. She traveled abroad alone, and used the break from her
regular life as an opportunity for self-exploration. She shared the significance of her self-discovery:

I had this self-realization. I was so comfortable being exactly who I am. It was really weird to just be me and go into this environment where no-one knew me and no-one knew anything about me. I felt like I was given the opportunity to create this idea of the person I was. It was really cool because I was a little bit different than I would have thought!

While Madison explored her identity abroad, she was struck by the level of friendships she was able to make in such a short time. “The relationships I made in Switzerland were much stronger than a lot of the friendships I have here,” she shared. “You just accept everybody as an individual and roll with it.” Through these friendships, she learned that even though she often felt unsupported in her attempts at environmental activism back home, there are others around the world who share her ideals. This inspired her to pursue a future in International Environmental Law, but only after she spends a few years in the Peace Corps.

**Nathan.**

“There [were] more people in my apartment complex in Shanghai than there are people in my hometown.” Nathan, a 21-year old Caucasian male from the South, is in his fourth year of a duel Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Having traveled to China during high school, Nathan looked forward to the opportunity to return for an extended period of time to meet degree requirements. He participated in three separate study abroad programs: two lasting a summer each during freshman and sophomore year, and a semester long program during his junior year. Though he lived with host parents who made him feel a part of
the family, Nathan often felt like he did not quite fit in to the larger culture - being a tall, white male in China. In Nathan’s own words:

I would walk on a bus and Chinese people [would] just stop talking and stare at you. That was hard sometimes being the different one. It’s fun at first [when] somebody wants to take a picture, but then after you’ve been there for four months and you feel like you fit in there and somebody runs up to you like, “Take a picture!” it’s like, “Okay.”

Nathan found it difficult to escape his obviously unique appearance - even among his Chinese peers and classmates. He often found it difficult to make meaningful friendships because he would typically be introduced as, “my white friend,” or “my foreign friend,” which mostly kept people at a distance. To his frustration, Nathan’s experiences taught him that “you can never be Chinese if you are not Chinese.”

Mike.

“I went someplace and people liked me for me. So I’m going to do me. And if people don’t like that, who cares?” Mike is a 22 year-old Caucasian male from the South, in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Humanities. Mike’s siblings had participated in study abroad programs during their college years, and his parents encouraged him to follow in their footsteps. Consequently, during his sophomore year, Mike took the opportunity to study in England for a semester to pursue elective courses. In truth, he was most excited about the opportunity of playing rugby (his true passion) for two professional teams in the area.

He summarized his semester in England as “liberating” and “absolutely life-changing.” Upon his return to America, he felt more at ease with himself. “I’m more me,” he explained. “I’ve shed the self-doubt and that’s absolutely freeing. It’s really nice to figure out who you are.”
He attributes this personal growth to the relationships he made abroad – especially with teammates who made him feel accepted in ways that he had never experienced at SU. He shared the impact of these friendships:

It’s one of those profound things I learned. We all think that we need solitude to change us, but you really realize it’s the people around you that change you more than anything. It’s not anything you can do. It’s stuff you have to realize about others to realize stuff about yourself.

Jerry.

“I can see myself working some job that requires me to travel all over the world.” Jerry, a 22 year-old Caucasian male from the South, is in his fifth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. Jerry saw study abroad as the perfect opportunity to gain sufficient language credits to satisfy his minor requirements. He chose to study in France for a full semester during his junior year, where he stayed with a host family who only spoke French. Jerry recalled how challenging it was at times to be surrounded by the French language twenty four hours a day when he was still gaining fluency and comprehension. By his account,

Sometimes you’re sitting in your room, going “I need to get English!” Sometimes you are tired, it had been a long day and you don’t want to think about it. You just want to speak English and be done with it!

Jerry felt proud after facing the challenges of living in a foreign country. He shared that the experience taught him to be self-sufficient and revealed to him what he was capable of. When Jerry returned to French class the next semester, an in-class activity reminded him of how much he had grown. The hypothetical situation required students to find a hotel room in Paris for
themselves and two friends at the best price. His first reaction was, “I’ve done that multiple times in that city! I’ve wandered around Paris looking for hotels and hostels. I’ve done that, like it’s no big deal.” He had clearly gained confidence in his ability to be self-sufficient as well.

**Billy.**

“I think my emotional intelligence just went through the roof.” Billy, a 22 year-old Caucasian male from the Southwest, is in his fifth year of a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. Being aware of America’s growing business relations with China, Billy recognized the benefits to be gained from understanding the Chinese culture and being fluent in Mandarin. Consequently, he chose to join two of his SU classmates in a language immersion program in China during the summer of his sophomore year. Billy believes that his time abroad helped him to mature and become more goal oriented. “It changed my whole perspective and focus about skating and being immature. It actually made me work and it forces you to have a better work ethic.”

While abroad, Billy took the initiative to spend several days networking with Chinese businessmen, who gave him an insider’s perspective into the business world. These firsthand accounts into the realities of his profession caused Billy to reevaluate concepts he had learned in the American classroom. Billy revealed:

I was a 20 year old, naïve, immature kid. I thought everything in the text book was true. But going over there and actually getting the truth was invaluable. You can’t get it from over here in the textbooks. You can’t get it from your professors, who aren’t natives of that country, you’ve got to go over there and immerse yourself in it.
**Forrest.**

“It’s like drinking out of a fire hose!” Forrest, a 23 year old Caucasian male from the South, is in his fifth year of a Bachelor of Science degree with a double major in the Professional and Applied Sciences and the Humanities. Though he enjoyed the demanding science curriculum, Forrest was drawn to the French language. He realized the only way to reach the goal of a dual degree in French was to pursue an intensive language program in France during the summer of his sophomore year. He summarized the experience as follows, “You’re exposed to so much all at once, but you can only do your best to try to keep up. That was the best part, the challenge of trying to do that.”

Forrest took a required class about French culture while abroad. He found the knowledge gained from this class especially helpful because it allowed him to understand the socio-historical context of the places he visited over weekends. In Forrest’s own words:

> It makes it come alive! It’s just an abstract thought until you actually see where the Count of Monte Cristo was written. It’s like a light bulb that comes on in your head. That gave me an inspiration to keep learning.

**Nick.**

“Being in a different country has definitely helped me to relate to different citizens of the world.” Nick, a 23 year-old Caucasian male from the South, is in his fifth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. Nick was inspired by his mother’s stories of living in South America for two years, and decided to follow in her footsteps by pursuing a month-long summer study abroad in Argentina during his sophomore year. Aware of life’s responsibilities looming after graduation, Nick’s primary focus during his time in Argentina was to have fun. Though
Nick “loved every minute” of “living it up” in Argentina, he doesn’t feel that the experience had many lasting effects. “I still remember it and love it, but I hate that it didn’t affect day to day stuff quite as much.”

Later in the interview, Nick shared that the experience of living in a poverty-stricken region changed his perspective. As time in Argentina passed, he became increasingly aware of the varied lifestyles and experiences of people in different parts of the world. He explained:

> It certainly opened my eyes to different problems that people face around the world, [and] introduced me to new ways [of living] that I wasn’t familiar with before. Having that knowledge, even though I may not practice it on a day-to-day basis, really helped me grow personally.

**Jacques.**

“I had thrown myself into the fire and got to improve my language skills.” Jacques, a 21 year-old Caucasian male from the Southwest in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences, chose to study abroad in France for a semester during his junior year so that he could focus on language learning. He recalled how challenging the first few weeks were, living in a non-English speaking country with very basic French skills. “Having to understand everything going on around me was very intimidating, but I just started building confidence in my ability.” He explained how he was able to do so:

> You have to go to the bars. You have to screw up speaking the language. You have to get laughed at by foreigners. But then you have to, in turn, laugh at them for speaking English wrong or something like that. You have to enjoy yourself and at the same time, you’ll be learning.
The experience helped Jacques to build confidence in his ability to be self-sufficient and to make friends outside of his comfort zone. He also learned the importance of being himself, no matter what the situation. “I can go to a completely different country and I’ll be fine - as long as I can just be myself. Then I can find some way to interact with people. I’ll do alright.”

*Ricky.*

“It taught me to seek new things to learn and to do, and to take advantage of opportunities.” Ricky, a 22 year-old Caucasian male from the South, is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Social Sciences. Having traveled abroad with his family during high school, Ricky knew that he wanted to see more of the world and wanted to speak a foreign language fluently. He chose to study abroad in Ecuador twice during college to pursue these goals. First, he spent one month in Ecuador during the summer of his sophomore year, then a full semester during his junior year. During both these experiences, Ricky especially enjoyed the anonymity possible while living abroad. He described the experience as follows:

I could be really apart from things if I wanted to be. I could be just a person that nobody knew in the middle of a million faces if I wanted to be that. I could do what I wanted to without the feeling that people were judging me or looking at me.

After being immersed in a foreign culture for an extended period of time, Ricky became more appreciative of his own culture upon his return. “I really relished in Southern things - saying Ma’am, holding the door open, eating black-eyed peas and okra. I was really sensitive to stuff I had never really noticed before.”
**Jim.**

“I feel like [studying abroad] will make it a little bit easier for me to put my roots down somewhere else at some point when I start my career.” Jim, a 22 year-old Caucasian male from the South in his fifth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in the Professional and Applied Sciences and the Humanities, had set a college goal for himself to study abroad in order to see the world. When the opportunity arose for him to spend a full semester during his junior year in England, he jumped at the opportunity.

Jim took design classes that he would not have been able to take at SU. In one class, he was able to try his hand at web designing, which sparked an interest as a future career option. Jim particularly enjoyed the interactions with his classmates, and found himself inspired by their level of work. “I had to work a little bit harder to compete on their level over there. It challenged me [and] made me a little bit more ambitious now that I’ve tried different things.”

Jim is very proud of the personal growth that occurred while he was studying abroad. He learned to be more independent, goal-directed, and confident. He summarized the significance of these learning outcomes as follows:

College in general is all about becoming independent and becoming an adult. Becoming someone who can make it for themself [sic] in the world. Studying abroad really intensified that. Doing it in a foreign country was another level of it.

**Analytic Themes**

The inductive examination of interview transcripts revealed several common themes that held meaning across participants. In speaking with senior year students who had studied abroad during their college careers about their psychosocial and career development, five main themes
emerged. Those themes included: (a) It was just great expectations!; (b) Beyond the “bubble”; (c) Life is all about the people you meet; (d) I grew more than I can ever remember; and (e) I’m more confident in my ability to be successful.

The first theme, *It was just great expectations!* discusses participants’ motivations for choosing to pursue foreign study, their expectations for the study abroad experience, and their perceived preparedness for living in a foreign culture. In addition, the theme also explores participants’ beliefs that every college student should study abroad. The second theme, *Beyond the “bubble,”* explores participants’ realization that the world is much larger and more diverse than their lifestyles had led them to believe. This theme describes the characteristics of the so-called “bubble” of home, as well as participants’ most memorable and challenging experiences as they lived beyond the “bubble.”

The third theme, *Life is all about the people you meet,* focuses on the significance of relationships during and after the study abroad experience. Here, several aspects of study abroad relationships will be explored, including: how participants built relationships abroad, and the characteristics and meaningfulness of these relationships. The theme also discusses the process of sustaining friendships (at home and abroad), both during and after studying abroad. Finally, the theme explores participants’ efforts at building diverse relationships post study abroad.

The fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember,* explores the areas of perceived psychosocial change associated with the study abroad experience, as reported by participants. The ways that participants are able to make sense of their growth and development are also explored. The final theme, *I’m more confident in my ability to be successful,* explores participants’ perceived academic and career development during and after study abroad.
participation. Changes in participants’ career choices, professional skills, mobility, ambition, and work ethic are discussed.

To further illuminate the findings of this study, Figure 1 serves as a visual translation of the psychosocial and career development of undergraduates who study abroad. Note that meaningful study abroad related experiences occur within the “bubble” (i.e., predeparture), beyond the “bubble” (i.e., while pursuing foreign study), and upon returning to the “bubble” (i.e., post study abroad.)

*Figure 1. Psychosocial and Career Development of Undergraduates Who Study Abroad.*
It was just great expectations!

“It was just great expectations!” Pope exclaimed enthusiastically, capturing the essence of his predeparture experiences. As participants shared their study abroad accounts during the interview, they typically included experiences and perspectives that spanned predeparture through post study abroad. This theme will explore participants’ predeparture experiences, including their motivations for choosing to pursue foreign study, their expectations for the study abroad experience, and their perceived preparedness for living in a foreign culture. In addition, the theme will also briefly explore participants’ post study abroad beliefs that every college student should participate in a study abroad program.

Participants’ motivations for studying abroad.

During the interview process, participants discussed their motivations for pursuing foreign study at length. Participant responses indicated six primary motivators for study abroad participation. In the order of importance, and in considering all participants, these motivators included: (a) an interest in traveling and exploring other cultures, (b) language learning, (c) being encouraged by others, (d) a need for adventure, (e) career development, and (f) gaining subject-specific knowledge. Principle motivations relevant to each participant are summarized in Tables 11 and 12 for female and male participants respectively.

Interest in traveling and exploring other cultures.

Among male and female participants collectively, a keen interest in traveling and other cultures was the chief motivator for study abroad participation (57.5%). As evident in Table 11 and 12, an interest in traveling was the chief motivation for pursuing foreign study among female participants (65%), and the second biggest motivator among male participants (47%). Several
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participants spoke at length about lifelong dreams of world travel. Kate, and several other participants, shared that they had “always” had an interest in travel, and that studying abroad was the perfect opportunity to bring that dream to fruition. Jane described having “that wanderlust for travel” for as long as she can remember, though her dreams of study abroad started in freshman year. She said,

I had always been interested in it. I had read the little pamphlets, but I had never really just signed up. So one day a year ago, I was walking past the study abroad office, and I was like, “I’m going to sign up!” And so I did. It was very split second, and very spur of the moment.

Rosa also described having an “interest for other countries.” She remembered sitting in a friend’s room, dreaming “about the places we want to visit when we were older.” Eileen shared Rosa’s interest in other countries, and explained that “even though the United States is huge, there are so many other things to see outside the country.” Eileen first realized how big the world is when she met a group of international students at a leadership conference in high school. “When I met all those international kids, I was like, I’m going to some of these places!”

For some, including Belinda and Kallie, the desire to travel and explore other cultures was first born while traveling abroad on family vacations. Belinda explained, “The idea of living [abroad for] an extended period of time just really drew me in.” “My goal is to travel to every country in the world,” Kallie announced proudly. At the time of interview, she had already checked 25 countries off of her travel list. Most participants’ travel checklists were significantly smaller, with many traveling abroad for the first time. However, this did not mean that other students, like Ross, were any less motivated by their desire to “experience a different culture
other than America,” or that students, like Reed, were not equally eager “just to see what was out there.”

Participants seemed acutely aware that international travel may become more difficult once their responsibilities grew post-graduation. They often saw study abroad as a last chance to enjoy a carefree existence before moving into the real world. “You don’t really have the opportunity to go to a foreign country for an extended amount of time when you’re in the working world,” Mary-Anne explained. “I know that when I graduate I’m going to try to get a real job, and you can’t just take a month off of work.” “You don’t have any constraints. You don’t have a family, a job…it is the only time in your life when you have the opportunity to go,” Reed agreed. Jim echoed Reed’s sentiment, “Once you’re in the working world. Traveling isn’t always something you get an opportunity to do as much.”

Language learning.

The second biggest motivator for foreign study among all participants was the pursuit of language learning (55%). Male participants seemed more motivated by the opportunity for language immersion (65%) than their female counterparts (48%). Participants discussed at length their frustrations of trying to gain fluency of a foreign language while attending SU. For Miriam, and many others, language immersion seemed the natural answer to this dilemma. “Knowing that to get to the point where I wanted to be with my German, I had to go and I had to live there and just speak German all the time.” Similarly, Pope had goals in mind of “increasing my French knowledge, learning the language and actually living the language.” He is of the opinion that “living what one is studying is the best decision one can make in college.”
Elizabeth was “so discouraged with German leading up to it,” and viewed studying abroad in Germany as a last hope to gain confidence in her language skills. Similarly, knowing that he wasn’t “exactly a language person,” Kevin hoped that immersing himself in the Italian culture would facilitate language learning. “Here on campus, you go to class three days a week, and for an hour you’re speaking the language, whereas you’re over there and you’re forced to speak it every day, all day.”

For Forrest, studying abroad was the only way he could gain language fluency in the midst of an already challenging Engineering curriculum. French “was just not something I was willing to stop taking just because it would be a strain on my curriculum,” he explained. “I’m doing chemical engineering so I can get a job. I’m doing French because I love it.” Several other participants used the study abroad opportunity to gain credits towards a first or second foreign language minor. Samantha, for instance, shared that “Spanish is my minor and I knew there was no way I was going to learn it without going to the country.” For her, it was a very rewarding experience to fulfill this goal. “Wow! I spent two and a half years taking these Spanish classes and I finally went to a country and put it into practice.” Belinda chose to study abroad to gain credits for a French minor. She was surprised to learn the difference between academic and spoken French. “In school you learn how to speak professional French, like how to write a paper, but you can’t speak like that to people. You’re not speaking colloquially. I learned so much French from the kids I hung out with,” she stated.

*Being encouraged by others.*

Female participants’ (39%) decisions to study abroad were particularly influenced by others’ encouragement - more so than their male counterparts (23%). Collectively, 32.5 percent
of participants considered social support an important motivator. Several participants chose their study abroad destination because a friend had already signed up for that particular program, offering a sense of comfort in the unknown that lay ahead. “I really wanted to study abroad, but I didn’t want to do it completely alone,” Sarah explained. Sarah soon convinced her friend Kallie to accompany her. “A lot of people wanted to do it. It was a time when my boyfriend and my friend Sarah said she’d go with me, so I thought it would be perfect,” said Kallie. Miriam found studying abroad in Germany with a group of students from SU comforting. “We all knew what the South was like. We could just speak to each other in English, which was good.” Eileen found that having a friend alongside her “helped because I wasn’t completely alone. I wasn’t scared or nervous.”

Others mentioned impactful discussions with encouraging professors, high school teachers, family members, and peers. For example, Nick was inspired by a parent. “My mother really encouraged me to study abroad [because] when she graduated she taught English for two years in Belize and loved doing that,” he shared. Mike’s parents encouraged him to follow in his sibling’s footsteps, who both studied abroad during college. “My parents said if I ever wanted to do it, to go do it.”

Others were influenced by teachers and professors. “I kind of always wanted to [study abroad in Argentina] ever since I was 15, because I had a Spanish teacher from there and she just always made it sound perfect,” Kiley explained. Laney shared how she was inspired during college by a faculty member, “The French professor that I had freshman year just strongly encouraged us to study abroad to work on your French, so I did that.” Likewise, Billy followed
the advice of a professor who told him to go “over to China and immerse yourself in their culture and their way of life.”

*The need for adventure.*

Thirty percent of all participants desired an adventure to break the monotony of daily college life. This rang more true for female participants (44%) than their male counterparts (12%). Kallie wanted to study in Australia to “do something out of the ordinary.” Michelle saw studying abroad in Ecuador as an opportunity to exchange the familiar with a more challenging setting. She explained, “So many people just stay in their comfort zone, but I believe that no-one can grow to the best of their ability inside their comfort zone.”

Rosa spoke of “a depression or something” that hit her unexpectedly during sophomore year of college. She looked at studying abroad in Scotland as a way to “change things up” so that she could “get out of that sophomore slump.” Jacques also needed a change, but for different reasons. “Before I left SU I really needed a break from it, ‘cause it’s just a weird place for me.” Belinda agreed, “Southeastern Town is so small. I just wanted to go to a different country and be anonymous.” Likewise, Nathan viewed studying abroad as a “break from small town life.”

Besides needing a break from SU, Jacques also looked at study abroad as a way to get distance from “friends who are doing stupid stuff or girlfriends who are being weird” so that he could “just breathe easy for a while.” Likewise, Natalie saw study abroad as an opportunity to escape troubled friendships. She felt abandoned when all her close girlfriends turned 21 and were able to go to the college bars without her. Disappointment and loneliness led her to sign up “on a whim” for a semester of fun abroad. In Natalie’s own words:
I was really on the outs with all my friends, so I didn’t even really tell anybody I was studying abroad. I just didn’t come back in the fall. I think I was just looking at study abroad like a quick fix to my problems. I’ll go to this foreign country and all my baggage that I had will be left in America. I was just like, I’ll just worry about all this when I come back and hope that time will heal stuff.

Several participants expressed a desire to meet new people. Lauren saw her sojourn in England as the perfect opportunity to meet people outside of her SU comfort zone. “It was an experiment because I am from a really small town and I went to a small high school. I was challenging myself to meet new people outside of Southeastern people.” Likewise, Kiley shared the desire to meet new people in an unfamiliar environment. “I just needed something different. I needed a new place. I needed new faces,” she explained.

**Career development.**

Only a few participants (20%) studied abroad with career development in mind. Under this category, participants considered the benefit of resume building, gaining go-to experiences in their field that will be useful for future job interviews, and the possible clarification of career choice. Female respondents in this study (22%) seemed slightly more motivated by career development opportunities than their male counterparts (18%). Ariel pursued an internship abroad with the hope that experience outside of her major field would broaden her career options. She explained, “I’m a Sociology major, I don’t want to go to grad school, I have too many classes to change my major, but I was interested in advertising and marketing and so I decided to do an internship abroad.” Miguel, on the other hand, described how he used the experience to narrow his career choices:
Prior to studying abroad, I was trying to figure out if I wanted to go to grad school or if I wanted to get a job somewhere maybe teaching English for a year. I just went to study abroad with an open mind, trying to make a choice between those two options.

With the working world around the corner, several participants hoped that study abroad would boost their resumes. Six participants completed at least one internship abroad to gain tangible work experience. “I knew that I was going to have to do things to make my resume stand out and to talk about in interviews,” John said about his motivation for pursuing an internship in Ireland. Steve was also “looking for something to put on my resume” and chose to study abroad in England when an internship opportunity fell through. When confronted with a choice between attending a less renowned institution and one that has a reputation for excellence, Mary-Anne chose the latter in order to “beef up my resume.”

*Subject-specific knowledge.*

Finally, only three participants (7.5%) explicitly stated that they studied abroad to gain subject-specific knowledge, including one female (4%) and two males (11%). Steve explained his decision, “The purpose of the trip was to take a required course for the business school. It is a really boring course, so we decided to take it abroad. It’s a lot more exciting.” Jim was pleased that the program in England “offered classes that we don’t offer here as part of our graphic design program.” He explained that the study abroad experience was instrumental in the development of his graphic design perspective:

Graphic design is all about looking at the world around you and taking things in and sort of synthesizing that into design. It was really fascinating to me to see some of the design of these other countries and some of the work that they had done.
Participants’ study abroad expectations.

“I had expectations and I don’t think I even realized I had them,” Jane said of her sojourn in Australia. “People were telling me, ‘You’re going to love it! It’s going to be the best thing you’ve ever done.’” As Pope recalled what he had imagined for his French sojourn, he exclaimed enthusiastically, “It was just great expectations!” Participants in this study spoke at length about their expectations regarding the study abroad programs, destinations, and academic environments they experienced. Though some participants were lucky, many students’ expectations were not met, often complicating the adjustment process.

Several participants learned that their study abroad destinations were much different from what they had imagined. “Going into it I really didn’t know what to expect,” said Nick of his trip to Argentina. “I was surprised at how civilized and developed everything was. My dad was like, ‘so it was just a bunch of people riding on llamas?’” Similarly, Elizabeth’s first sojourn in Germany was in a much different setting than she had expected. “We really didn’t know what we were getting into. I thought I was going to a small remote village in the middle of nowhere, but it turns out it was a substantial city.”

Ariel traveled to Northern Ireland expecting it to be similar to Ireland, where she had an amazing first study abroad experience. However, she soon learned that “it was just not what we were expecting at all. It’s still a really conflicted place. We were all kind of in shock about it.” Ariel was not the only student who expected her second sojourn to mirror the first. Elizabeth was taken aback when an internship abroad was nothing like her meaningful first experience in Germany. She shared the significance of this difference:
It was completely different from studying abroad. It was going and working. It was adult corporate life. I didn’t go with a group of friends; there was no-one sharing the experience with me. I was completely on my own, living by myself, trying to make friends by myself, going to work, figuring it out on my own.

Riley was also struck by the isolation of her internship experience. “It was 9 hours every day by myself, behind a computer. I’m just a really relational person, so that was hard for me,” she explained. As she had been expecting to learn from someone with more experience, Riley was also very surprised to learn that she did not have a supervisor during the internship. “When I got there, they were so excited that I was going to be able to help them [because] no-one knew the art I was supposed to do.” Riley had to learn the hard way – by figuring it out herself.

Participants often spoke about the unexpected rigor of their classes abroad. Many shared that they had mistakenly expected study abroad classes to be easy, and they were not prepared for the amount of work that lay ahead. Lauren explained that classes abroad were “very different, and very hard. I did not expect it! I thought this would be an easy A. Not! I would call my mom in tears, like ‘I can’t do this!’” Rosa’s Latin class in particular posed quite a challenge because it was at a more advanced level of language skill than she had anticipated. “The Latin program was double the amount [of work] here, which was strange to me. I didn’t expect that at all. The first day of class I was about to cry.”

Natalie also quickly learned this was not the “study abroad vacation” she was expecting. She explained, “Yeah, I don’t know where people get off saying that study abroad was such a joke. My classes were genuinely hard!” Miriam was equally surprised to learn how much work
her German language classes entailed. “It turns out the school system was not as much fun as I thought,” she said. “Studying abroad was actually kind of hard!” Scout agreed.

Alternatively, a few students expected the classroom experiences to be more challenging than they actually were. Belinda was very relieved when she realized that she was on equal academic footing with her classmates. “I was really nervous at first, but no-one in the class was a native French speaker, so it was really dummed down. The teachers would go over things as many times as you needed to make sure you understood.” Similarly, even though Eileen found four hours of Chinese a day to be “a little bit in your face intense,” she felt that “it wasn’t nearly as hard as I thought it would be.”

Miriam learned that her German professors did not practice the student-centered approach she had come to expect from American professors. “German educators have a reputation for being very harsh. Teachers don’t help students. They just don’t.” She was not prepared for the academic challenges posed to her, and felt helpless when resources were limited.

A few participants didn’t know what to expect from the classrooms abroad. Ashley was surprised to learn that her classes consisted mostly of field trips and tours to businesses in London. “I didn’t realize it was going to be so hands on,” she explained. “I never thought I’d get to just walk in Lloyd’s of London and have a tour.” When Ross studied in Germany, he expected to share a classroom with fellow undergraduate students. “I was intimidated [to be] in class with graduate students. We were really competing for grades in a subject that someone in this class already had an undergraduate degree in. It was very challenging.”
Participants’ preparation for the study abroad experience.

Lauren, like several other participants, felt as though the study abroad experience was “a situation where you don’t know what you’re doing and you don’t know what to expect.” Despite attendance of the mandatory predeparture orientation meetings hosted by the Study Abroad Office at SU, the majority of participants felt underprepared or even completely unprepared for the experience of living in another country. Kate explained,

Our sessions before South Africa were not helpful at all. They were all about really general travel advice. There’s nothing in terms of history of place and explanation of culture. That would [have been] really helpful. It was more, ‘this is where you are going to stay, don’t go out at night by yourself, and there is this bar down the street that is fun.’ That was about it. We were not prepared.

Nick also believed that the orientation sessions “didn’t provide us with much guidance.” He found adjusting to life in Argentina to be difficult because he was only told “where the school was and where we’re supposed to live and we got on a plane and went down there.” Randy agreed, “We weren’t oriented; we were just thrown in.” Samantha felt as if “having someone to tell you stuff about each culture” would have been helpful. She explained how such knowledge would have increased her cultural sensitivity:

I didn’t know that it was rude to not wear shoes inside until someone else outside of the study abroad office told me. Why would I know that? Why wouldn’t study abroad tell me something like that? I don’t want to offend my host family!

In addition to a lack of cultural preparedness, Samantha felt as though the orientation sessions were “not so much about mentally preparing you to study abroad.” Several participants
echoed the belief that they were not completely prepared for the emotional stress of independent travel. John felt his anxiety increasing as the date of his departure drew closer. “I was just really excited until about a week before and then it started being nerve-wracking because I had never been out of the country before and I was going for two months!” Ross shared similar predeparture concerns:

I was apprehensive of going because I had never been too far away from home before and this was my first experience leaving the country. I was really scared because it was the longest flight I’ve ever taken and being thrust into a country where I didn’t know the language whatsoever.

Ashley knew that she would be “a complete nervous wreck” prior to departure. She explained, “I was nervous about being with people I didn’t know somewhere that I didn’t know where I was!” Laney, on the other hand, was “nervous, but not freaking out.” She questioned her decision to study abroad several times prior to departure, not being sure if she could really survive living by herself in another country. Also thinking about the many unknowns ahead, Eileen had different questions in mind as she said goodbye to her parents at the airport. “You’re more nervous [about] what is going to change at home while you’re gone, more so than what’s going to happen to you when you get there.” Samantha’s departure was especially stressful, and she needed a little extra help making it on to the plane. She relayed her story:

I was fine till like right before I had to leave. I felt like I was about to jump off a cliff. It was just terrible! I knew I was going to break down and I did. I just started crying and my family shoved me through security. My mom was saying, “You wanted to go, right?” I
was like, “Yeah, I did!” The whole plane ride there I just remember thinking about the plane ride home. All I could think was, “Why did I do this?”

Several participants felt emotionally unprepared for the stresses of adapting to life in a foreign country. Miriam was surprised by the homesickness she experienced abroad. “I didn’t think that I would have missed everybody as much as I did,” she explained. Similarly, Natalie did not expect to be sad. “I thought the grass would be greener on the other side, but I still missed home. It was just sad.” Though Samantha anticipated some homesickness, she did not expect it to affect her experience that much. She remembered thinking on her first day abroad, “I am not on a high at all. This is terrible!” Similarly, Jane felt blindsided by the overwhelming sadness she experienced due to being away from her twin sibling for the first time. She described the frustration of this experience:

I was so excited. I was like, “I’m going to study abroad, I can’t wait!” I get there and then I started missing [my twin] very much. I called my parents crying all the time, which sucked because I didn’t want to be like that! It was just a huge turnaround from what I thought it was going to be like. I thought, “Maybe I can’t do this!”

A few students were taken aback by situations that caused their identity to be challenged. While in England, Mary-Anne was rudely confronted by a local man about America’s gun laws. “I was just not prepared to speak with someone about something like that,” she explained. However, that was not the most challenging part of the exchange. “The most difficult thing was just encountering people that would stereotype me. A lot of people think Americans are ignorant.” Lauren was equally taken aback when newfound friends questioned her American way of life. “It’s stuff that I never thought people would notice. I mean, I don’t know why we
have so much fast food! We just do. It made us think about our culture - what we do and why we do it.”

As an African-American male, Miguel’s experiences with racism in Ecuador called his own identity into question in a way that he was not expecting or prepared for. He explained:

My advisor told me Ecuador is so diverse and it’s just a color spectrum. Then you get down there and they have people of African descent [who] were discriminated against. I looked like those people and I wasn’t discriminated against because they told me I was like white. It was weird for me. If I had been born there, I would have to beg for money. It was crazy.

Though many students felt the study abroad orientation sessions could have better prepared them to adjust to life abroad in a foreign culture, a few students felt as if there was no way to fully prepare for living and studying abroad. “It’s definitely not something you can really grasp until you’ve done it. I was really anticipating my trip, but it’s completely different once you do it. There’s no way to tell what it’s going to do to you,” said Mary-Anne. Kate felt similarly,

I don’t know if it’s something we could have been prepared for in a lot of ways. Even if we had read a lot and talked about it before we went, it still would have been a thought in our heads. There is only so much preparation that you can do until you experience something first hand and then it becomes real.

Regarding the preparation process, Samantha shared similar beliefs. “I don’t really know that the study abroad office could prepare you for whatever situation you walk into.” Riley made sure to consult resources outside of the study abroad office while preparing for her sojourn in
Spain. However, despite her best attempts at gaining knowledge, she still did not feel prepared. “You can make so many expectations,” she explained. “I asked so many questions before I went, but nothing will really tell you until you experience it. It was very different from what I expected, but so very amazing at the same time.” Forrest agreed that “it’s impossible to be completely prepared.” He explained, “It’s kind of like drinking out of a fire house. You are exposed to so much all at once, but you can only do your best to try to keep up.”

Interestingly, although participants’ expectations of the study abroad experience were not always met and some participants felt unprepared for living in a foreign culture, many believed that these challenges were just a part of the growing experience. “I’m a firm believer in growing outside of your comfort zone,” Michelle explained. Upon returning home, it seemed that memories of negative experiences began to fade and were almost completely overshadowed by feelings of excitement and pride.

During the interview, many participants shared the belief that all undergraduate students should pursue foreign study. Ariel suggested, “I will tell anybody to go abroad. You learn so much about yourself and you will come back more prepared for whatever you go into.” Mary-Anne agreed, “I’ve told everyone I think they should do it.” She felt as though “there’s really no better time to go than when you’re in college.” She offered advice to those interested in studying abroad, “Go anywhere, really. Anywhere is a good thing.”

Participants have been such advocates for the study abroad experience that many have inspired their friends to follow in their footsteps. Some hope that their children will one day also have the opportunity to pursue foreign study. Table 13 lists examples of participant comments about the importance of the study abroad experience for college students.
**Summary.**

This first theme, *It was just great expectations!* explored participants’ predeparture experiences, including their motivation for pursuing foreign study, their expectations for the study abroad experience, and their perceived preparedness for living in a foreign culture. The theme also explored participants’ post study abroad beliefs that every college student should participate in a study abroad program.

**Table 13  
Advocating for study abroad.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>I absolutely feel that it offers a lot more to my life and it would to anyone else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>My advice to anybody who gets the chance: If you can, go!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>I was just the biggest cheerleader. If someone was interested, they were going to get a knock on the door from me and I would push them. I would hold their hand, tell them who to talk to, anything to get them to go abroad and have that experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>I’ll encourage people to do it because it is definitely a good experience. You need to know the world you live in. It is a wonderful place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>I think if for no other reason than personal enrichment, people need to do it. I think that everybody would be well advised to pursue that opportunity if they can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallie</td>
<td>I would recommend it to anyone. I think it should be a requirement to graduate if you can afford it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>I would recommend anybody [to] go for the whole year because you won’t regret it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>I would suggest than anyone and everyone goes to study abroad. I definitely believe that every college student should study abroad. It is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>For my brother and sister who are younger than I am to see me go to Spain…I just hope so much that they’ll do study abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>I’m really encouraging minority students to study abroad, because I don’t think a lot of us are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>I’m so thankful that I got to do all this. I want to make enough money so that my kids can do the same thing that I did, because I think it’s just so important to have the opportunity to go see the world and experience another culture for more than just a short term vacation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I want to tell people, “If you want to grow up, study abroad!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond the “bubble.”

“Our world isn’t centered on us,” Riley suggested. “There’s so much out there going on. It’s a much bigger story than just ours. Ours is a little story.” Like Riley, several participants came to see their life and the world in general in new ways once they had studied abroad. “I think I easily forget there is a world outside of just where I live!” Ashley explained. “Going over there and just seeing how they live in other parts of the world, you know that it’s not just here, there are so many other cultures and people.” Several participants shared that getting distance from the familiarities of home helped them to mature in unimaginable ways.” “I was very stuck in the bubble,” Ashley said of her life prior to studying abroad. This theme will explore participants’ comments regarding living and learning outside of the familiar “bubble” of home.

Characteristics of the “bubble.”

After studying abroad, several participants came to view the familiar realities of home as a “bubble,” or a “box,” uncharacteristic of the larger world. It seems prior to studying abroad, participants were less aware of the so-called “bubble” they lived in. For many, it was only once they had stepped out of familiar environments that they were able to see how separate their realities had been from that of the larger world. “I didn’t’ realize that I was in a bubble,” Steve said. “This is not even the real world.” Table 14 gives examples of participant comments describing their lives in America as living in the “bubble’ or the “box.”

Though the word “bubble” was used often, it seemed to represent many different ideas among participants. Some, like Ashley, used the word to describe the sheltered comforts of home and family. Some participants used the word to describe the unique reality of SU and the small-town atmosphere of the city where of SU is located, hereafter called Southeastern Town. For
example, Sarah suggested, “[Southeastern Town], I’m sure anybody can tell you, it’s kind of like a bubble. Everybody is almost kind of the same.” Steve agreed, “At [SU], it’s pretty closed-minded. Everybody is kind of the same, more or less.” Mike felt that studying abroad showed him how “you get stuck in a mold [at SU] that you have to dress a certain way, believe certain things and stereotypes.” After living in England for the semester, Mike was certain that, “there’s more to life out there than Southeastern Town or State.” Madison also had this realization,

I realized how small this little place is and how small this little bubble is. How sorority isn’t significant in the world and there are all these people on earth. Study abroad almost put me in my place, this one little person from this one small region. It makes you realize there’s this huge big world out there.

Table 14
*The “bubble” and the “box.”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>I was out of my box. Before I was very stuck in the bubble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>America has this huge bubble. There’s so much more out there to see, there’s so many different people you meet who have different backgrounds and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laney</td>
<td>[I was] removed from the little bubble I live in here. I think the perspective I was able to gain, pulling myself out of this bubble, I think that’s what helped me grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>[I was] living out of the box. I feel like I realized how small this little place is and how small this little bubble is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>We’re not in the box as much anymore, and we realize that there’s something out there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>My world is a bubble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Southeastern Town, I’m sure anybody can tell you, it’s kind of a little bubble. Everybody is almost the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I kind of look at Southeastern Town as like this social culture little bubble now and I realize this is not even the real world the way people interact. It made me aware of the bubble.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though not all participants used the word “bubble” explicitly, many described the phenomenon in other ways. “It definitely opened my eyes that there are other things out there than America. That McDonald’s and Netflix is great, but it’s not everything that’s out there,” Kevin explained. Before studying abroad, Nick believed, “Like, United States, the best! Why would you want to go anywhere else?” After studying abroad, he realized that “you really can gain a lot from seeing other countries and that there are different ways to do stuff.” Mike agreed that “there’s a whole bigger world out there. It makes you realize you’re not the coolest guy in the world. You’re just a shithead American running around.”

Participants also often shared what they were like and what perspectives they held while living within the “bubble.” Billy thought of himself as “a 20 year old, naïve, immature kid.” Reed thought that he was “never real sympathetic to the poor or the needy in other countries.” Natalie admitted, “I was insecure.” Additional examples of descriptions of self before leaving the “bubble” may be found in Table 15.

Without exception, when participants shared these descriptions, they did so as a baseline to indicate just how much these characteristics changed after studying abroad. The meaningfulness of the study abroad experience in terms of personal growth and development will be discussed in greater detail under the fourth theme, titled; I grew more that I can ever remember.
Table 15
*Descriptions of self in the “bubble.”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>I [didn’t] always give back as much as I should.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>[I was trying] to live up to the standard of what you think that you should be while you are at Southeastern. I’d see international students walking around campus [and] I went like, “Oh, god!” You know, just annoyed. I was very closed minded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>I wanted to just skate through, not put that much hard work into it. I just wanted to live the whole college life cliché.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Before, I thought I was going to be here in the South forever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>I used to be so scared about what I was going to do after college. I used to be obsessed about getting a 4.0 and getting into grad school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>[I was] sucked into acting a certain way and seeing the world a certain way. I used to think that I had a say in things that I don’t have a say in - social problems or issues - [like] whether a guy wants to marry another guy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>I’ve always been a people pleaser, and I always wanted to do what other people thought was best. I would just sulk at home, “Oh, I feel too fat to go out,” or all those insecurities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Wanting to be accepted is something I struggled with a lot. It would affect my schooling, my choices, how I related with my family. I was more judgmental and not open to new things and new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Before I would have been like, “I can't do this, like there's no way I can go to some country [where] I don't even speak the language and navigate the city and do all this by myself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I wasn't exactly completely aware of the rest of the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Life beyond the “bubble.”*

For most, going beyond the “bubble” was an exhilarating and eye-opening experience. Participants were often over-stimulated by their new environments. “It’s kind of like drinking out of a fire house!” Forrest suggested. “You’re exposed to so much all at once. You can only do your best to try to keep up.” Miguel agreed that it was “just like information overload!” In Miguel’s own words:
Here you are conditioned to seeing certain kinds of cars and certain kinds of people. But there, it was like, “Oh my god! I’ve never seen that kind of building and that kind of car, or a person who looks like that!”

Ross felt as if “it's one thing to see pictures, but to actually sit there and breathe the air of the area was something like an out of body experience for me.” Belinda felt comforted to know “what is out there, and that [Southeastern Town] is not it.” She was invigorated by the realization that “there is a world out there that is amazing and beautiful with so many things to do.” Similarly, Michelle found herself paying attention to every little detail around her. “You become appreciative of the little things, like flowers. I stuck my hand in the Pacific Ocean! It makes you more appreciative of art and nature whenever you see it.”

Besides being captivated by their surroundings, several participants rather enjoyed the opportunity to be anonymous and to start over with a clean slate. “It was kind of liberating!” Steve explained. “I’m never going to see these people again. [I] could have done whatever I wanted.” Similarly, Natalie thought that “it was nice to start over and do whatever I wanted. I didn’t know anybody over there. Here, I had a reputation. It was nice to go over there with no responsibilities.” Samantha agreed, “You felt sort of anonymous there – which can be good and bad. It was really freeing!” Natalie and Samantha both enjoyed leaving the SU “bubble,” where “I feel like everyone watches your every move,” explained Samantha.

Participants were asked to describe their most memorable experience abroad. Table 16 summarizes participants’ responses in the order of most to least common. Nearly half of all participants (47.5%) felt as if they most remembered traveling locally and exploring the surrounding areas or countries. They told stories of exhausting backpacking adventures through
Europe, which Lauren referred to as “the worst and best four weeks of our life.” Others, like Kallie, were thrilled to have spent her 21st birthday in an exotic place. The next most memorable experience (32.5%) was meeting new people and building friendships abroad. “It’s those people who really made the experience great. Not the people I went with, but the people I met there,” Ariel explained. The significance of relationships during the study abroad experience will be explored in greater detail under the third theme, titled; *Life is all about the people you meet.*

Table 16
*Participants’ most memorable experiences abroad.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traveling locally and around the area/country</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jacques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kallie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nathan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jacques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kallie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ariel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miguel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miriam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Randy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ashley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natalie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ricky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kiley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natalie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Randy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miriam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Riley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants’ third most memorable experience (30%) was sharing in the local culture and enjoying the immediate surroundings. “It was fascinating to get an idea of some different cultures around the world,” Jim stated. Similarly, Michelle thought, “It was amazing being around people different from myself, learning about an entirely different culture and adjusting.” Miriam believed that learning about the culture firsthand was especially valuable. “Being completely immersed in the culture and not just learning about it in a classroom but actually going there and getting to experience the people really helped.”

Several participants (17.5%) considered partaking in adventure sports (like bungee jumping, shark cage diving, and canyoning), or outdoor sports (like rugby, tennis, and running) most memorable. A few participants (12.5%) most remembered social events they attended, which included everything from informal gatherings over dinner, to wild toga parties, to local music performances. Two participants experienced major health issues. One participant was moved deeply by her involvement in a homeless service project abroad. Finally, only one participant found that gaining language skills and subject-specific knowledge was the most memorable part of his study abroad experience.

Although the experience of leaving the “bubble” was positive for most participants, the experience was not without its fair share of challenges. During the interview, participants were asked to discuss their most challenging experiences while studying abroad. Table 17 summarizes these experiences in the order of most to least common. It is important to note that these were not the only challenges that each of the participants discussed, but merely the most challenging experience that immediately came to mind in response to this question. During the interview, the
challenging experiences listed in Table 17 became much more salient among participants. The table did, however, remain comprehensive.

According to participant responses, three challenges were equally memorable: (a) adapting to the language barrier, (b) adapting to the culture barrier, and (c) forming relationships and other relational issues. With regards to the language barrier in general, Jacques felt as if “having to understand everything going on around me was very intimidating!” Trying to navigate the train stops when French is being spoken terribly fast was particularly challenging. “You have to not only take in what they’re saying in French, change it in your head to English, and then come back with what you want to say in English, change that to French….It’s very confusing!” Jacques explained. Forrest’s thoughts as he first recognized these challenges in France were, “I have a whole summer of this? This is going to be awful!”

Luckily, after a few weeks, most language learners became more adept at hearing the language. However, those participants in foreign language countries who were not engaged in language learning had a particularly challenging time. “It was like I was in this huge city and all this stuff was going on around me, but I didn’t understand because I didn’t speak German,” Laney explained. Miriam had a similar experience, “No-one spoke English. I was like, ‘I don’t know what’s going on! This is scary!’” Steve also found that trying to communicating in English while in foreign language countries was a major challenge. “An American accent is strange enough over there, but a Southern accent got a lot of laughs. They were like, ‘Never heard anybody talk like this!’”
Table 17

Participants’ most challenging experiences abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to the language barrier</td>
<td>Belinda, Billy, Jacques, Jerry, Kate, Pope, Reed, Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to the foreign culture</td>
<td>Ariel, Forrest, Jerry, Kate, Miguel, Reed, Scout, Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming relationships and other relational issues</td>
<td>Ariel, Billy, Mike, Natalie, Reed, Riley, Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing emotions, including feelings of homesickness and loneliness</td>
<td>Forrest, Jane, Ashley, Laney, Kallie, Madison, Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to live independently in unfamiliar surroundings</td>
<td>Ariel, Elizabeth, John, Kevin, Lauren, Michelle, Randy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to classes and grading systems abroad</td>
<td>Annie, Ariel, Kallie, Kiley, Lauren, Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing health concerns</td>
<td>Ashley, Eileen, Miriam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being “other” and having the American identity challenged</td>
<td>Mary-Anne, Mike, Nathan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling independently and taking risks</td>
<td>Nick, Ricky, Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling with career choice</td>
<td>Rosa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who lived with host families or foreign roommates often found the constant language immersion exhausting. “My host mom knew nothing [in English] and I carried a dictionary around with me all the time,” Samantha said. Eileen found it nearly impossible to communicate with her roommate. “I didn’t know how to say something in Chinese, so we’re basically using hand signals and trying to figure out what’s going on.” Facing this challenge all day can be very frustrating. Elizabeth shared the experience of trying to communicate in German with a non-English speaker, “It was just like a wall. We just can’t keep doing this if she doesn’t understand me. I was so frustrated!”
It was times like those that students desperately needed to hear the English language. “Sometimes you’re tired, it had been a long day, and you just don’t want to think about it. You just want to speak English and be done with it!” Jerry explained. Scout agreed, “Sometimes you just want to hear English so badly!” In these instances, students turned to American English podcasts, or spoke to family and friends at home via video calls. This seemed to help the frustration, at least for a little while.

Besides facing challenges with the language barriers in foreign language countries, participants also had to adjust to the foreign culture itself. Steve shared his experience in England, “You’re kind of irritable or uncomfortable. The culture is different, the food is different, you’re not in your normal environment.” He believed that the culture barrier between people can be all encompassing, and included “anything from gestures you make to the things you talk about to sense of humor.” Though Steve was intimidated by these differences at first, he quickly learned, “if you’re in another culture, do like the Romans do.” He made several attempts to fit in the culture better, including changing his characteristic SU wardrobe.

Several other participants also adapted their behavior in order to be respectful of the host culture. “It’s surreal,” Eileen stated. “China’s culture is the opposite of Western culture in the United States. It’s a bit intimidating to try to bridge those culture gaps when you first get there.” Billy was equally surprised to learn some of the Chinese cultural norms. “If you don’t eat everything on your plate, it’s rude. If you’re not smacking [while] eating your food, it’s rude. You need to be loud when you eat. I was like, ‘Wow! Really?’” Forrest thought of these learning experiences as “things you can’t get exposed to unless you get out of the country [and] spend time somewhere else, getting to know the people and the culture.”
Participants sometimes faced challenges forming and maintaining relationships abroad. This was often a very complex issue, involving both language and cultural barriers. For instance, several participants found that individuals in the host culture were less likely to initiate communication, which posed quite a challenge relationally. “You have to go up to them pretty much the entire time there,” Billy explained about relating with his Chinese peers. The challenges of making friendships abroad is discussed in greater detail in the third theme, *Life is all about the people you meet*. 

Surrounded by an unfamiliar environment, many participants missed the comfort of their home and family “bubble.” Several participants experienced difficulty managing feelings of homesickness and loneliness while abroad. Samantha felt sadness as soon as she boarded the plane. “I was so nervous, so sad. I was like, ‘Why did I do this?’” Jane started feeling sad once she realized the full implication of being separated from her twin sibling for the first time. “I was so sad and homesick, which I didn’t expect. It was a weird feeling for me,” she explained. Others began to feel sad when they missed significant events back home. Rachel missed a large family reunion. “I was surprised by how sad I was to miss that,” she stated. Riley also experienced loneliness and homesickness, but chose to embrace this challenge as an opportunity to “go back to past things that I never allowed myself to feel and face being alone.” She recalled that is was a very tough summer, but thought it was “beautiful in that loneliness” and emotion at the same time.

Unfamiliar surroundings beyond the “bubble” posed unique challenges. Participants had to learn how to navigate confusing city streets and to use public transit systems. They had to find stores to purchase necessary items, and restaurants to eat satisfying (albeit foreign) meals. Some
really missed the familiar comforts of home. “The most challenging experience was just the simple adjustment to get used to not being here in the South where I’m familiar with everything,” John explained. Scout was shocked to discover that her new home in Costa Rica did not have air conditioning, a blow dryer, or more than 5 minutes of hot water – things she had come to expect from her American way of life. “I forget that not everywhere is like America,” she said. Missing the comforts of home, Samantha’s first few days in Spain were especially challenging. She described her experience as follows:

I remember the first night in my room and I was just like, “Oh, is this my room? This is terrible!” I was thinking, “I can’t believe I’m going to stay here for the next four months!” I just cried myself to sleep that night. The next morning, I didn’t feel that much better. It wasn’t really until the next day that I was like, “Okay, I’m going to be alright.”

Several participants found it difficult to adapt to the academic classroom, the unfamiliar grading systems, and teaching styles abroad. Many were not expecting the academic environment to be any different from what they were used to in America. Several participants misjudged the academic rigor of their study abroad program, and had to learn the hard way that they did not sign up for a “study abroad vacation” as they had expected. Participants often drew comparisons between the academic environments at home and abroad. For example, Mary-Anne believed that the classes abroad were “definitely more difficult. Noticeably harder, for sure!”

Additional examples of participant comments comparing classes in the United States and abroad may be found in Table 18.
Table 18
*Differences between classes at US and abroad.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>The university there is a very different grading system and a very different every kind of system. That was a big adjustment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacques</td>
<td>They don’t have the kind of limits that they put on themselves like American professors do. Like my French history teacher pointed at a black girl in my class and said, “Are your family slaves?” All the Americans in the room were like, “I can’t believe she just asked that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Here, [class] is very hands on. There, it was very disconnected. I feel like I didn’t really get feedback and I didn’t really learn much. Feedback is what I thrive off of. That was frustrating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>[Classes were] maybe easier in some ways, but harder in some ways. We met less often and you were expected to work independently more often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallie</td>
<td>They want more facts and not opinions. You work twenty million times harder there. Here, I would have thought you were crazy for not giving me an A. [There], they wouldn’t give you reasons; they would just give you a C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiley</td>
<td>It was super difficult. Here they give you homework, you have grades. If you mess up once, you can make it up on something else or they’ll drop it. There you’ve got the midterm and final. That’s it. You’re pretty much screwed if you don’t do well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laney</td>
<td>It was different because we had no papers, no tests, or anything. It was just the final exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>They were a lot stricter over there. We went for 2 hours and they just lectured. No-one took notes, we didn’t buy books. We never had a test until the last two weeks of school [and] we had a huge research paper due. That was it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
<td>Their grading system is really different. They grade a lot harder. A 75 and up is an A, instead of a 90 and up. They dock you points for everything. They grade really hard!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>It was nice that you walked in and these teachers know my name and we were not in a huge auditorium. In the Business school at [SU] we tend to get a lot of foreign teachers that you just can’t understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>The work over there was just so demanding. Papers were 10 pages, and that was normal. You have to go research at the library. It was just totally unreal for me to what papers are here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic expectations were much different abroad than what participants were used to inside their SU “bubble.” Ross “quickly found out that we get babied a lot here in America when it comes to our educational system.” Rosa discussed the structure of her Latin class in Scotland, “You only have a midterm and a final. The midterm is a paper you turn in, like 5000 words. It was a lot of work! I’ve never had that before.” Kiley was very clear about the fact that “I do not like the school system in Argentina!” She was frustrated with the way that no homework assignments were given, and that her entire grade depended on how well she performed on an oral midterm and final exam. “Classes are two or three hours straight and it’s just the teacher sitting up there talking to you, and it was in Spanish, so I couldn’t zone out,” she said irritably.

With the grading systems abroad often being completely unequal to that of the familiar SU “bubble,” many participants described complete shock and confusion as grades were first awarded. Sarah explained, “It would say a 60 and they are like, ‘Good job! That’s a pass.’ I’m like, ‘No, it’s not good that I got a 60!’” Participants were discouraged when their best work did not get rewarded with an A. Kallie didn’t understand why she was not performing well in papers, because professors “wouldn’t give you reasons. They just give you a C.” After doing poorly on her best efforts, she desperately enlisted the help of her Australian roommate to proofread her papers. It was a confusing experience because Kallie’s work ethic and level of writing remained consistent while at home and abroad. “Here, I would have thought you were crazy for not giving me the A!”

Others found that their professors were not as student-centered as they had come to expect from American academe. Miriam shared the details of an upsetting exchange with a professor in Germany. After she had devoted much time researching an assigned topic without
finding relevant resources, Miriam approached her professor for help. She was appalled when he turned her away, saying “I can’t do your work for you.” Miriam shared her frustration, “I just feel like that would never happen in an American university. Teachers won’t just be, ‘I don’t actually have time to help you figure out the topic that I assigned you.’ That was completely unfair!” Kallie was equally appalled by the lack of student-centeredness at the Australian institution she attended. When she had to miss class to return to America for her parent’s funeral, the host institution required a death certificate as proof. Kallie explained her anger, “I was like, really? You want me to take a picture? Or videotape the funeral? C’mon now. I just would think they had a better system in place.”

Participants’ lack of academic focus might have contributed to the challenges they faced while adapting to the academic classroom abroad. Though a few participants were able to balance academic responsibility and the need for adventure, most participants seemed willing to sacrifice academic achievement for sightseeing and carefree fun. “I didn’t go study abroad to take a bunch of economics classes,” Eileen admitted. Kallie agreed, “Are you really going to remember in ten years that you went to class or that you went to New Zealand?” Though Kallie is typically a straight-A student, studying was not her primary priority while in Australia. “A quote we all lived by was: You’ll be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than the things you did do.” Natalie and her friends had a similar motto, “I mean, you’re only in Florence once! I’m going to do everything I can and just take advantage of every single moment there.” For Natalie, that usually meant more time spent outside of the classroom than inside. Thinking about his priorities while studying abroad, Steve admitted, “I guess it was really a vacation, it wasn’t really like school.”
Three participants faced major health issues while abroad. One was diagnosed with a life-threatening condition and had to spend a full month in the hospital, causing her to miss a significant amount of class time. Another was bitten by a rabid dog and had to receive rabies exposure treatment for two months. Though these events were unforeseen, one student had to overcome a known chronic stomach condition exacerbated by the stress. Though not all participants experienced health issues, many noticed health and bodily changes, including weight gains and losses, while they adjusted to the foreign environment.

Often for the first time in their lives, participants were faced with feeling “other” in a foreign culture. These experiences included looking distinctly different from the host culture, being treated differently by others in the community, and facing constant language and cultural barriers. In Korea, Reed “stuck out like a sore thumb.” He explained, “I was the tallest person there by two feet. They didn’t even know what my blond leg hair was. Little kids would come up and pull it. They just didn’t understand.” Nathan had a similar experience in China, though he felt as if he was granted “celebrity status.” “Kids would scream, “Foreigner!” and people would take pictures,” he explained. Initially, Nathan enjoyed being different. However, after living in China for several months, he wanted more than anything to be treated like everybody else and to be considered a part of the community. He suggested, “It was fun at first, but it got hard in the end.”

While traveling beyond the “bubble,” it was not uncommon for participants to become aware of the American stigma, which further caused them to feel “other.” Kevin explained, “You are stereotyped without even knowing it [because] you’re American.” He felt as if people would “immediately think, ‘I’m going to look down on you’” when they realized that he was American.
“There are a lot of people over there who hate us because we are loud and obnoxious.”

Becoming aware of these stereotypes was difficult because it often felt like “your whole culture is being challenged,” as Miguel explained. Sometimes, this realization was sparked by uncomfortable conversations with “people that [were] just kind of judgmental about the fact that I was American,” as Mary-Anne explained. She was surprised when a British man confronted her about his disapproval of American gun laws. “I got in a heated debate with someone I met at lunch about the second Amendment and gun control. I was just not expecting anything like that!”

Table 19 gives additional examples of participant comments related to feeling “other” and becoming aware of the American stigma.

Interestingly, despite learning about negative American stereotypes and becoming aware of their American “bubble,” participants often grew more appreciative of their home and country while abroad. “I feel like it’s made me appreciate where I come from more,” Ross stated. “What did I learn? That I love America. I feel like we complain a lot here about simple things that we take for granted.” Table 20 lists additional comments related to a new appreciation for home.

Traveling independently in the surrounding areas and countries posed several challenges. Participants had to learn how to navigate train and bus systems, how to purchase plane tickets, how to find affordable accommodations, and how to avoid group conflict. John had to learn to plan and precisely organize brief weekend trips in order to accommodate his internship schedule. “Knowing that I had to get back, you had to get on the plane at the right time and get back because they were expecting you at work on Monday.” When he traveled in a larger group, “I found myself being the go-to person for making the plans, getting us places, organizing, and talking to other people.”
Table 19

*Being other and becoming aware of the American stigma.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>Even though they speak English, they treat you like you are foreign because you are to them – but you don’t feel like you are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>People would look at you, like, “Okay, you’re not from here.” All the girls were French and, not necessarily rude, but not really all about talking to foreigners. Sitting at dinner, they were all talking so fast to each other and I had no idea what they were saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>My best friend over there, he was black, and the Chinese people would come up to me and ask, “Hey, can we take a picture with your buddy?” I’ve never seen anything like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>The first time I studied abroad I was kind of like an outsider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>It was challenging because I am not a drinker or a smoker, and most people who were there were very party-party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>When you’re there, you’re the outsider and you’re the foreigner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>No-one will help you. We were lost and obviously we look American. They were looking at us like, “No, go away.” You were like, “Why would you not like to help somebody?” There were other people who looked at you like, “What are you doing here?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
<td>You feel a little out of place. I think the most difficult thing was just encountering people that would stereotype me. A lot of people think Americans are ignorant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>I’ve been in that experience of, “Oh, I’m not the same as everyone around me.” On campus, I was the only African American. Every time I walked somewhere, Chileans were staring. I got to experience what it feels like to really be in the minority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>When I was abroad, I was sort of arbitrary – like the third person. I wasn’t in the culture. It’s just like you’re an alien and people want to know so much about you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>I thought that everybody hated me and that I just looked like an idiot, so I didn’t want to go up and speak German to them because I was scared that I was going to say something stupid and they’d be like, “Oh, American, learn how to speak our language!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>I knew that not everybody in study abroad was going to be like me, a sorority girl from the South. It was just what I had expected. I was like, “Do I fit in?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Everybody is out of their comfort zone, so it’s like you’re all outsiders together. They’ll introduce you as “This is my foreign friend.” It’s fun at first, but it got hard in the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>When I was in Osaka, we were unusual, so people were interested. I feel like people in Tokyo were tired of American students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>We looked odd. We looked really out of place. [You] stand out because you’re American. You don’t know what you’re doing over there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

168
Table 20
*New appreciation for home.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>I kind of took a lot of things for granted at home. Like the fact that you know that you can go to any bar you want and they’re going to serve you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>It just made me realize, wow, I’m lucky to be American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallie</td>
<td>Coming back, even if my classes are boring, I don’t care because they are US classes. I don’t have to deal with mean teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiley</td>
<td>I learned that America rocks! [Our] school system might not be as great as Europe’s, but at least it’s better than theirs. It showed me things that I think are great about America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laney</td>
<td>It made me appreciate home more than anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>The time I spent in Chile made me more appreciative of the things that Americans have easy access to but yet we take for granted. Once I got back I was more appreciative of my surroundings and I had more pride in my own country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>I appreciate a lot of the things I have more now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>I’m lucky as hell and I really appreciate everything that I have more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>I was just so over SU and then I came back here in the spring and I was like, “I have missed it.” It just made me appreciate SU. It made me appreciate my friends and family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>It made me realize not to take for granted the depth of social interaction that is available when you are all speaking the same language and you all understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed</td>
<td>South Africa really changed [me] so much. Just how lucky I am to be in America, much less with the family I grew up with who cares about me. I am so much better off than I think I am. We were so thankful that our taxes are not more than 50% of our income!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>Coming back, I was really sensitive to Southern things. I really relished Southern things, saying “Yes, ma’am, No, ma’am,” holding the door open, eating black-eye peas and okra - that kind of stuff. I was really sensitive to stuff I had never really noticed before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>[I] definitely [learned] about how fortunate we are over here. It is amazing how two places can be on the same planet and then be so different.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Traveling together in groups could be challenging, though, despite the best planning. “We had a four week break that two other girls and I backpacked the entire time. It was so tiring. It was exhausting! I never knew. It was mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausting,” Lauren explained. She recalled that “it took a lot of skill pleasing everybody, saving money, and figuring out where you want to go.”

Participants often took risks during their travels. They shared stories of going into dangerous situations and encountering questionable characters. One female participant shared the story of how she and a few of her girlfriends accepted a ride from a random stranger when they got stranded at a train station in Poland. “It could have been really bad,” Samantha explained, after describing that the man who helped them drove a suspicious van. Though they were all very scared, their options were limited and so they decided to take the risk. “We had our very important things on our bodies. We were ready to jump out of a moving van if we had to,” she laughed. And then she said very seriously, “I could have been kidnapped. That was the only time I thought I was in very serious danger.”

Finally, one participant’s most challenging experience abroad was the internal struggle she faced while narrowing career choices. Rosa had changed her major rather spontaneously the semester before studying abroad in Scotland. However, once there, she was drawn to Chemical Engineering once again. Through conversations with friends and an emotional self-discovery, she was able to reach a decision before returning home. Though Rosa’s struggle was unique in some ways, she is not the only participant who experienced stress associated with career choice. Miriam unexpectedly discovered that her long time dream of working as a professor in Germany would not be a good fit with her values. After experiencing German academia first hand, she
realized that she is not willing to teach “in a system where I can’t be supportive of my students.” For Miriam, this meant reconsidering previously discarded career options and formulating a new life plan. However, Miriam is thankful that the study abroad experience allowed her to identify this incongruence. “I’m glad that I found that out now, as opposed to five or ten years from now when I was in the system and just miserable and didn’t have another option.”

**Summary.**

The second theme, *Beyond the “bubble,”* explored participants’ realization that the world is much larger and more diverse than their lifestyles had led them to believe. In addition, the theme discussed the characteristics of the so-called “bubble” of home, as well as participants’ most memorable and challenging experiences as they lived life beyond the bubble. Through facing these challenges outside of the “bubble,” participants grew in unimaginable ways and learned a lot about themselves and the world. The meaningfulness of leaving the “bubble” will be explored in greater detail in the fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember.*

**Life is all about the people you meet.**

Without exception, all participants believed that relationships played a central role in their study abroad experiences. When each participant was asked what they considered to be the biggest benefit and most memorable parts of the study abroad experience, thirteen (32.5%) responded that it was the relationships they had made. “It’s the people you meet over there that make the experience for sure,” Kevin opined. “Life is all about the people you meet. This is just a tiny example of it.” Rosa agreed, “The relationships were probably the biggest thing that made a difference in my life.”
Many participants spoke nostalgically about the meaningful friendships they had made while studying abroad. “It’s those people who really made the experience great. Not the people I went with, but the people I met there. I still talk to them today, and it is a year and a half later,” said Ariel. For Forrest, the study abroad friendships he made were a pleasant surprise. “You think, ‘Oh, I’m going to go experience French cuisine and see the Eiffel Tower,’ but you don’t really expect the vast variety of people you meet. They really make the whole experience.” Randy agreed, “I mean, if I did it by myself, didn’t make a relationship with anybody, it would have almost been for nothing to me.” This subtheme explores the ways participants built relationships abroad, the characteristics and meaningfulness of these relationships, and the impact of study abroad on relationships at home.

**Building relationships.**

While living in an unfamiliar place, participants often turned to new friendships for comfort. They forged friendships with fellow students from SU, other American students, international students, and students from the host culture. Initially, participants seemed to build friendships with other American students in order to feel “a certain level of comfort,” as Kate explained. “Having other students around that are familiar with your culture was a big supporting factor,” John explained. Other American students could understand homesickness and longing for American culture. They could also alleviate some of the pressure of all day language immersion.

However, Kevin warned that staying close to American students might mean that you’re closed off to other cultures. “All it takes is one kid to be like, ‘No, let’s just hang out by ourselves and go out to the American bars’ for everyone to be like, ‘Yeah, that’s the easy thing
to do.” Rachel agreed, “You meet a lot of exchange students who go and build a tiny America. In their rooms they’ll have all English things and have all English speaking friends - that sort of thing. That’s very easy [and] natural to do.” Natalie explained that her social group consisted mostly of American students abroad. “We kind of dropped the ball,” she said about making friends with other international or host country students. “I think we were just kind of obsessed with each other.” Natalie was so wrapped up in these new friendships that, “I knew I was in Italy, but I couldn’t pick out Florence on a map.”

As participants gained confidence in their new surroundings, they often made new friendships with international students and those from the host country. Jacques explained that at first, students from SU “clung together because we didn’t know anybody else,” but once classes started, they were exposed to other groups of people and made new friendships. Participants were often fascinated by students from other cultures, and international friendships were appreciated and celebrated. Jacques was thrilled that “I got to interact with people from all over the world in a situation where we were all kind of on the same footing.” Forrest shared that he “loved talking to people from different countries and cultures, seeing how they lived and comparing it to what I do on a daily basis.” Being fascinated by her international friends’ background and perspective, Mary-Anne was excited to learn that “he was just as interested in me as I was in him.”

When international friends got together, it was never dull. One of Kiley’s fondest memories was “sitting at a big table and you would have four or five different languages being spoken” over dinner. “It was fantastic!” she exclaimed. To celebrate their diverse backgrounds,
Jane and her group of international friends held an international night. “We were all dressed up to represent our colors, and we all sang our national anthems. It was funny.”

Building relationships was a seemingly effortless task for most. Several participants suggested that the shared experience of trying to adapt to a foreign culture created a common bond among study abroad participants. “You’ve been thrown into this foreign country and you’re all pretty much alone. So you bond together and you make these really, really close friends,” Eileen explained. This phenomenon was often referred to as being “in the same boat.” Regarding living independently in a foreign country, Madison said, “It is hard! That’s why you make friends overseas so you can talk about it with each other! Everyone is alone and going through [the] same weird, sad, ‘What am I doing here? Where’s my family?’ thing.” Table 21 gives additional examples of participants’ comments about the process of bonding through shared experience.

Table 21
*Bonding through shared experience.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>We were all in the same boat together, and so we understood. It was all new to all of us. That was our bonding experience. We have that same experience to look back on together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>You build such a close bond in that short period of time because you’re going through the same experiences and you’re in the same place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacques</td>
<td>I got to interact with people from all around the world in a situation where we were all kind of on the same footing. We were all in the same boat, so it was really cool knowing that we could all rely on each other if we needed to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>It’s a bond we all share. We were there at the same time and did the same things. It’s something great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>If we missed our family or friends, we’d always be willing to listen. I built a support system basically, and I supported other people. It was nice to have that interconnectedness with everyone and just being strong together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>I found that was much, much easier to make friends with other exchange students because you are all on the same team, confused by what’s going on while trying to put together this language and trying to get out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, participants discussed that fellow study abroad participants showed an immediate, almost unconditional, acceptance of one another. “You find the people who study abroad will have similar mindsets,” Forrest explained. “They’re all willing to get to know other people. That makes it a lot easier.” Natalie suggested that participants were immediately drawn to the mystery of one another. “It was like clean slates with everyone. I was like, ‘Tell me about your life! I know nothing about you.’ It was fascinating to hear about other people’s lives.” Mike was particularly moved by his newfound rugby team mates’ unconditional acceptance. He shared the meaningfulness of this experience:

They really genuinely loved me, and I genuinely loved those guys. They were so accepting and that was the biggest thing. They really welcomed me in. I will always be a part of that team and that’s so special to me. They’re my true friends.

Participants described making friends on the plane as they left for their big adventure, during orientation at the home and host institutions, in their residence halls or apartment buildings, and while exploring the local cuisine and nightlife. Natalie suggested that the lack of “electronic distractions” encouraged study abroad participants to “just hang out and get to know each other.” She explained, “Here, you just sit and watch TV all night, but in Italy we didn’t have that option, and so you would hang out and interact with people.”

For Ariel, spending free evenings with her peers was an important part of building friendships. “It wouldn’t have been the same experience had I not gone out at night with them and just kept to myself. If I had done that, I wouldn’t have made friends,” Ariel explained. Mary-Anne agreed that “not having to make a salad in your dorm room at night, but [to] be able to go out to dinner and talk to people” was a crucial part of making friends. She was grateful to have
had enough personal funds to be able to afford that. “It’s all about interacting with the other people there, or else there’s really no point,” she suggested.

Many meaningful conversations occurred during dinnertime. Reed and his Korean roommate would spend many evenings learning about each others’ cultures. “He’d tell me all kinds of stuff. They had different ways of looking at things that I would have never known.” Jacques discussed the meaningfulness of eating dinners with his host dad. “We would talk about what I’d done, the news of the day, sports, and politics. He helped me with my French, and I got to help him with his English. That was really cool.” Randy spoke of a tandem partnership he had in Spain. “They want to speak English, you want to speak Spanish so you meet in the city, or a bar, watching a football game, and then just talk. You help each other learn, but you also become good friends.”

For a few participants, cooking dinner in the communal kitchen of their apartment complex or residence hall created another great opportunity to interact with others. Kallie, Sarah and their roommates would teach one other how to cook various cultural dishes. Kallie described this exchange, “We taught our Chinese friend how to dye Easter eggs and he loved that. Our Australian roommate would fix us lamb. Our Norwegian roommate would teach us Norwegian.” Lauren also cooked together with her roommates, and found it fascinating to see the different cultures in action. “We’d be cooking fried chicken or something, and she’d be cooking this weird meal. We would just be watching her like, “What? Why are you adding that?” They just did the weirdest stuff!” Cooking together also proved to be the perfect time for thought-provoking conversations. “They were so eager to learn about our culture. They would ask me why we have
so much fast food. It’s stuff that I never thought that people would notice. I mean, I don’t know why!”

Rachel also shared a kitchen during her study abroad to Germany, and she enjoyed the social interaction, which often lasted for hours. However, when she returned abroad to Japan for a second semester abroad, “I had my own kitchen in the apartment in Japan, and that was really kind of isolating. I saw very few people infrequently.” Of the latter experience, Rachel shared, I learned that it is a lot easier for me to meet people when I can get to know them more casually. When I was in Japan I felt like I had to go to events and make friends with people and then be their friend because I wasn’t going to see them again. It was much more awkward.

**Characteristics of study abroad relationships.**

Participants described at length the relationships they forged while studying abroad. The majority of participants described their relationships as deep, uninhibited, and meaningful. “It’s like I’ve known them for years,” Eileen stated. “The kind of friends you make in study abroad is different than the friends you’ll make in most of your life because you are bonded together. You’re really, really close friends even though you’re only together for three months.” Mike agreed that his study abroad friends are “completely different than my friends here. I’m probably closer to some of them than a lot of the guys here.” Participants described their new study abroad friends as their “best friends,” “true friends,” and “family.” Table 22 provides examples of comments that described the strength and depth of participants’ study abroad relationships.

The study abroad experience brought Elizabeth and her SU classmates “closer” than before their summer abroad, when they felt rather awkward around each other. She believed that
her German professor at SU could “tell a difference” in the group because they were “making jokes in our classroom exercises from our experiences.” Likewise, Reed felt as though the study abroad program “ended up bringing me really, really close” to his study abroad peers. “I’ll never undervalue the relationships that I made through my study abroad trips,” Reed stated.

Table 22

*The strength and depth of study abroad relationships.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>I got really close with my roommate and my tutor who were both Chinese. My best friend over there, he was black.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>They were my best friends to be honest with you. I still keep up with all these people that I met from different countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>We really were each other’s family and best friends for three and a half months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Some of the people I met there I still consider some of the best friends that I’ve made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>We were in the same friend group and knew each other well, but we weren’t like good friends. When we came back, we were like best of friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed</td>
<td>The study abroad trip actually ended up bringing me really, really close to some of the people on the trip.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The depth of most study abroad relationships seemingly created an environment of trust where friends were willing to share candidly with one another about their lives and views of the world. “We talked openly about a wide range of things, like open discussion about our backgrounds, and everything. That brought us closer as friends, to understand each other better,” Ross explained. Similarly, Madison felt as if “we talked about everything. I never felt uncomfortable about something.” Having faced major opposition at home for efforts at environmental activism, Madison found it comforting to learn that her study abroad friends were immediately accepting of her views. In Madison’s own words:
Just to be around people who…even if they didn't think the same way I did, they accepted that I thought that way and it was okay, and I was still just Madison and like that was what Madison thought. It wasn't a big deal ever or anything.

Though most participants deeply bonded with friends while abroad, a few participants found that the language barrier sometimes prevented them from forming meaningful relationships. “I wish my Chinese was better at the time so I could be able to converse more with the locals,” Billy stated. “I could only talk on the surface with them. I really couldn't have a deep conversation. It wasn't as intimate as I would have liked it to be.” Rachel agreed, “It is not easy to be as close when you have a language barrier.”

Steve pointed out that while trying to make friendships abroad, there is often “a language barrier and a social barrier. Anything from gestures you make, to things you talk about, to sense of humor.” Though Riley worked with several English speaking persons from across the world during her internship in Spain, she also felt that cultural barriers created a lack of deep relationships. “I made friendships over there, but maybe personalities weren’t as deep or the interactions were surfacey [sic]. We just weren’t the best of friends,” she explained. Several other participants were also struck by the lack of friendships during the internship experience.

Elizabeth shared her experience of working in a hotel in Germany:

It was completely different from studying abroad. It was adult corporate life. I didn’t go with a group of friends. There was no-one in my boat, so to speak, sharing the experience with me. I was completely on my own, living by myself, going to work, figuring it out on my own.
Meaningfulness of study abroad relationships.

Most participants considered the relationships they built abroad to be very meaningful. Several described how these relationships had a profound impact on the way that they viewed themselves and the world in general. “The friendships that I made there made me so happy and so okay with being me, and just changed so many aspects of my life,” Mike asserted. He explained,

We all think that we need solitude to change us, but it’s the people around you that change you more than anything. It’s not anything you can do, it’s stuff you have to realize about others to realize stuff about yourself, too.

Jane’s study abroad friendships also sparked personal self-discovery and acceptance. Jane believed that hanging out with a “fast crowd” of friends who “loved to go out and know how to have a good time, reinstated who I am within this world.” She explained, “I am a nondrinker. I loved to go out and party with these people, but I will not fall subject to peer pressure.” Madison found comfort and self-acceptance through conversations with her study abroad friends about topics that can be controversial in the South. “Sex has this really weird negative stigma and I don’t think sex is wrong or bad when you’re in a relationship with somebody you care about. That’s something I’ve gotten judged for a lot, and there was none of that around my [study abroad] friends.”

Sarah met her future husband while studying abroad in Australia. “He’s the biggest part of my study abroad experience,” she said. He consoled her after her best friends’ parent passed away, and helped her to grieve while adjusting to her new surroundings. “I not only found what it is to love, but to open up and share completely everything with someone. He has made me a
better person,” she explained. Sarah believed that this relationship has taught her to be “open of new experiences and accepting of them,” because she could never have imagined that she would meet such an important person in her life while studying abroad for the semester.

Several participants also learned that it is possible to have something in common with people who are culturally different from them. “I learned a lot about just putting myself out there and making friendships. Finding similarities with a brick wall and somebody I never thought I could,” Laney explained. Similarly, Belinda felt as though it is “really nice to know that even if you’re in a country with French people who don’t speak the same language, don’t have that much in common with your culture, you can still find someone to get along with.”

A few participants had a profound realization that relationships can transcend cultural barriers. Through the many activities shared with his host family, Forrest learned that there are “things that transcend international boundaries: music, sports, academic learning, and a desire for pure human interaction.” He believes that these things can “really bring together people who may otherwise be vastly different.” He explained that although “each culture or group of people has its own ways of experiencing them, these disparities are inconsequential for those who are open to gaining a worldly perspective.” Riley learned a similar lesson when she became involved in a service project in Madrid where they delivered sandwiches to homeless persons living in the subway stations. She shared how this experience touched her:

To see the people’s faces light up in a different language... Smiles cross languages. One lady just held my hand and said, “Gracias, gracias, gracias!” Oh! I just melted. I just wanted to stay there all night long talking with those people.
Those participants who experienced a lack of meaningful relationships learned unique lessons. For Rachel, “Having difficulty making friends in Tokyo reminded me of how important to me my friends here are.” She explained that in some ways the study abroad experience may have made her more reticent to go far away from home again for an extended time, because she realized that she would much prefer to stay closer to her friends and loved ones. Riley discussed the loneliness she experienced as a result of a lack of deep relationships while pursuing an internship in Spain. In her own words:

In those quiet times, I really got to look at who Riley is. If I had always been around people, then I wouldn’t have realized how much I do cherish them. This summer was beautiful in that loneliness because I got to dig back and go to past things I never allowed myself to feel and face being alone. I think I have always been scared to be alone. Out of this summer in Spain I got to face that fear.

After the lack of deep connections in Spain, Riley decided that next time she travels, she will be doing so with loved ones. Likewise, Rachel stated, “I do think it would be a lot easier to do these things with someone. It just makes every day more fun.” Though her boyfriend was in Japan at the same time that she spent a semester there studying abroad, they were in different cities, making it difficult to see each other often. Rachel had chosen to go to a different institution that was more academically rigorous, but now thinks of this decision as “foolish.” Knowing how isolated she was from everyday interaction with people, Rachel said, “If I could do it again, I would not have lived in that area. I think I would have been happier if I had tried to go to the same university that my boyfriend was in.”
In making new friendships, participants learned about social and interpersonal skills. Laney felt as if she learned “a lot about communication and my ability to make friends and to find something in common with people.” Rosa also learned to be more confident when making friends, and “to just step out and not be as shy.” Likewise, Ashley felt as if the study abroad experience “made me more outgoing” and gave her the confidence necessary to “want to meet new people.” Forrest believed that the study abroad experience teaches “interpersonal skills that you can’t really get in a classroom.”

Those participants who were able to make meaningful connections also often learned to work well with others. “Study abroad taught me how to work with different people,” Kallie explained. “I had to live with boys that were messy and didn’t want to kill bugs in the house.” Others learned how to overcome the challenge of collaborating with others under stressful circumstances. Steve explained the challenge of traveling through Europe with new friends. “When you hang out with somebody 24 hours a day, it gets kind of hostile to an extent,” he explained. Lauren agreed. “It was frustrating at times because we all had different personalities.” Lauren was glad when she and her travel partners soon learned how to work together despite their differences. “Sometimes we would just say, ‘Okay, let’s stop talking! Let’s just walk away from this and get a break.’” Lauren believed that this experience taught her how “to work with people better and understand my limits as a person and what I can contribute to a group.”

Several of the participants who were focused on language learning created a tandem partnership with a native speaker in order to enhance fluency in the foreign language. Randy explained, “They want to speak English, you want to speak Spanish. So you meet in the city, or a bar, watching a football game, and then just talk. You help each other learn, but you also become
good friends.” Pope and his study abroad peers played flash card games in restaurants in order to strengthen their understanding and application of the French vocabulary. When the group went on field trips, the more fluent speakers would help those who were less fluent to understand what was being said around them. “We all helped each other out,” Pope stated. “I learned to work well with people from different backgrounds. It was an amazing experience.”

Participants and their friends often spoke openly about their career and life goals. Rosa had impulsively changed degree programs right before going abroad, and was uncertain whether this had been the right choice for her. Rosa believed that the relationships she made with people in her apartment complex helped answer that question. “Some of the guys would just start talking about their Engineering school work and I remember all if it. I was like, why do I keep feeling this yearning to be back in the Engineering department?” She spent many nights discussing her fears about a future in Engineering with her study abroad friends, and they convinced her that she would find the career fulfilling if she perseveres. Rosa changed her major back to Engineering when she returned to SU the following semester, and has remained confident about this decision. Similarly, Elizabeth was about to give up on the quest toward German fluency, but her new study abroad friends convinced her to persevere. She said that “the people I was there with, their support of saying, “You can do it! You can keep going with this! Don’t be discouraged!” is the thing that helped her to keep going. Upon returning to SU, she declared German her major.

Forrest enjoyed getting exposed to people outside of his home comfort zone because he was able to “see how hard people in other countries are willing to work to be successful.” This observation made him reflect upon his own career and life goals. “It told me that I needed to
push myself more. That I still have more capabilities than I’m letting on,” he explained. In
conversation with a classmate abroad, Ross realized that, “I’m in the phase of my life right now
where I kind of need to be solidifying what I want to do.” He was very impressed that one of his
peers had already written a book, yet was only a few years older than him. It motivated him to
excel as he moves forward in his career. Eileen also realized that she needed to solidify her
career plans:

Everyone wants to talk about, like “what are you going to do?” So just talking to
everybody, the more I thought about it, I felt like maybe I should get a plan going here
since the end of my college career is coming up pretty quickly.

Jim was also inspired by peers within his profession. He made friends with a graduate
student in his field who was also studying abroad in England. “It was interesting to have
conversations with her and to nerd out about things like a typeface or a design style. I could look
at what she had done and get an idea of where I want to go,” he explained. She also encouraged
him to pursue graduate school abroad, which is something he had not considered before.
Likewise, Madison really appreciated it when her new friends shared her passion for
environmental activism. “That really opened my mind that there are people all over the world
who care about this environmental stuff and it’s not weird that I do,” she explained. “That made
me realize I can do that with my life and it’s important to a lot of people.”

_Sustaining study abroad relationships post study abroad._

“I met a lot of really great friends there, people who I still talk to everyday even though
my experience is over now,” Jacques stated. Given the meaningful nature of the relationships
that were formed abroad, it is not surprising that participants have attempted to maintain these
relationships after they returned to the United States. Many spoke about using social networking sites like Facebook to keep in touch with friends, while others used Skype to video call their friends and host families abroad. Mary-Anne explained why technology is so useful for maintaining friendships:

It’s actually nice because they do make an effort to keep up with me, and I make an effort to keep up with them. Facebook is great for that, because Facebook doesn’t have to abide by any time zone rules. It is just on your own time. It’s easy to keep up with people like that.

Though Pope agreed that Facebook is useful tool to stay in contact with his study abroad friends, he misses the depth of face-to-face relationships. “It’s nothing like being around those people. It’s nothing like laughing and crying and working with those people. Facebook doesn’t have that. It’s totally different.” Table 23 gives additional examples of participants’ comments regarding the benefit of technology for maintaining study abroad friendships.

Though most participants said they were making a point to keep up with their study abroad friends, Natalie had a different perspective. Though she felt really close to these friends while abroad, once Natalie returned to SU, she reexamined these friendships and found that they did not hold lasting significance. Natalie explained that on Facebook, “we’d be like, ‘miss you!’”, but in truth she felt that they “were just kind of all party buddies” who didn’t have much in common other than a shared study abroad experience. “We were thrown together and there is nothing firm that tied us together besides the fact that we were all abroad in different countries and didn’t know anyone,” she explained. Though, despite realizing that these relationships were
not as meaningful as she had once thought, Natalie still talks to her study abroad friends on Facebook sporadically.

Table 23
The usefulness of technology for maintaining study abroad friendships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>I stay in touch with them, even if it’s just on Facebook. I get to keep that with me for the rest of my life and it’s something I cherish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>We still keep in touch here and there on Facebook. It’s kind of neat!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>On Facebook I can talk to somebody in Amsterdam or Copenhagen or have a connection in France or Switzerland or Spain. That’s extremely valuable just in general, for myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>With Facebook, we can still show pictures. It makes it a lot easier [to keep in touch] with Skype and stuff. So, [we] definitely still get to hang out kind of. It’s great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>I’m probably closer to some of them than a lot of the guys here. I still talk to them on Skype every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>We’re lucky to have Facebook, and so we keep up with each other through that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pope</td>
<td>I just talked with him yesterday on Facebook. That’s something about Facebook. You can keep those friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>I talk to my host family probably once every two weeks through email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>Facebook has just opened up our communication because I think we speak to each other about once a week still and it’s really fun, to just make sure everybody is doing well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most participants in this study expressed excitement that they were now able to say that they have friends all over the world. “All my buddies, all they have are American friends. Now I can say that I have close friends all the way across the globe. I think it’s cool that I’m able to say that and they’re not,” Billy explained. Participants were also excited at the prospect of perhaps reuniting with their study abroad friends one day. For many participants, the added benefit of international friendships is that they will always have a place to stay when they travel. Table 24 gives examples of participants’ comments about reconnecting with their study abroad friends during future travels.
Table 24
Reconnecting with study abroad friends during future travels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>It’s really cool to meet those people because you always have contacts in life. You can call somebody that you met studying abroad five years later and go, ‘Hey, I’m in Munich, are you here?’ You have friends everywhere. It just makes for more exciting possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Now every city I travel to I know someone there that I can call or I can throw a message on Facebook and say, ‘Hey, I’m going to be over here, what are you doing?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>If I go back to France, Germany, Spain, or Mexico, I know people. If I go to Peru I’m going to call somebody and say, ‘Hey, can I come stay with you?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>My biggest personal benefit was to meet people outside of my country. I told a lot of my friends from South Africa, whenever I’m in the area I’ll look them up!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impact of study abroad on relationships at home.

While participants were building exciting new friendships abroad, most also stayed in touch with their friends at home. Again, technology seemed to play a major part in sustaining relationships that were continents apart. Participants spoke of using Skype to video call family and friends in the United States and connecting via Facebook and electronic mail. Table 25 gives examples of comments related to the usefulness of technology in maintaining friendships at home.

Laney felt as if the study abroad experience helped her to learn a great deal about “my ability to stay close to someone and to keep in contact” despite being separated geographically. “I learned a lot about what different people mean to me, and what I mean to them,” Laney explained. Likewise, Miriam was glad to learn that “I can go away for a year and it is not going to destroy that relationship.” She felt grateful that “I can still write people e-mails and talk on the phone and maintain a relationship – even if we are not in the same town.”
Table 25  
The usefulness of technology for maintaining friendships at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Facebook is a wonderful tool. Skype was great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallie</td>
<td>It made it nice that I could Skype my mom and my friends. If there was no Skype, I don’t know what I would have done. Skype was like my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Facebook is a hell of a tool when it comes to keeping in touch with people when you’re abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Kallie Skyped me in Australia several times. We talked about everything. It was fun to catch up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
<td>I was leaving behind a big family and a boyfriend, but we video chatted from overseas, which was nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>At nights whenever I was kind of lonely or homesick, you have Skype where you can video your family and all back home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>I think the only time I ever heard or spoke English was through Skype, once a week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For some, being separated from their friends at home helped them to discern who their true friends were. Rosa was able to witness “How they really could sacrifice their time for me as I would sacrifice it for them because we were 6 hours away from each other on different schedules.” Mike was able to make this distinction upon returning from study abroad. He explained, “My best friends in the fraternity were the guys who were happy to see me more than anybody else and the guys that I’ve wanted to hang out with.” He admits that when he first got reunited with his SU friends, “it was different” between them, but “now it’s just the same.” Others did not feel that initial estrangement as they had feared they would. “It was kind of like I had never left,” Eileen shared. Rosa described her friendships at SU as the kind of relationships “where you feel like there isn’t any time lost.” Likewise, Kallie was glad to learn that “if you have good friends, they’re not going to forget about you.”

For some, returning from study abroad was an eye-opening experience that caused them to break ties with previous friends. “It’s like they expected me to go abroad and stay the exact
[sic] same. I just am not,” Ariel said. Jacques felt as if “the puzzle [didn’t] fit together anymore” with some of his friends because “I definitely changed and they didn’t change – and that’s the problem.” He explained that although no major fall-out occurred after studying abroad, there was a mutual understanding of, “You know, let’s not hang out as much anymore.” Nathan shared that some of his friendships had grown stronger while being abroad, while others grew more distant. Like Jacques, Nathan also felt as if “we just didn’t have as much in common after I came back.”

This phenomenon was not unique to male participants. Madison explained that she “got back from Switzerland and overhauled my life.” She broke up with her long-term serious boyfriend and ended friendships that were no longer meaningful to her. “I came back a different person,” she explained, which created a “really big disconnect” with those people who had stayed the same. Madison also chose to drop out of her sorority because she was seemingly unable to relate to her sorority sisters and Greek life in the same way she did prior to studying abroad. “Why am I paying all this money to go to meetings with people I don’t know - that I don’t enjoy - when I have all these other things that I really care about that I can do?” she asked herself. “This doesn’t matter and I just don’t care.” Ariel had a similar experience:

My sorority just seems so pointless to me now. I wouldn’t change joining it because I’ve met so many great people. But coming back, it’s just like, “Why are we doing this?” It just all seems so superficial and judging of others. I’m just trying to get above that now. I don’t want to judge others anymore because I don’t want them to judge me.

Though Kate felt a similar disconnect with some of her sorority sisters, she was sympathetic to the fact that “a lot of them haven’t traveled much abroad and they haven’t had any connection to the people that I feel like I have from my experiences.” Kate believed that this
caused them to have “very different beliefs about a lot of things” and that “it’s hard to get what I feel like I should be getting through to them.” She suggested, “Unless you’ve had the experience you can’t understand it.”

Several participants also felt as if their friends who had remained at home were unable to understand the significance of the study abroad experience. “A lot of times they don’t care, like “Oh well, you went to Spain,” Randy explained. A few participants suggested that the lack of interest may have been caused by jealousy because they were unable to study abroad. Sarah remembered how some friends would make “catty comments, like, ‘Oh well, we can’t all go to Australia.’”

Others suggested that those who were unable to study abroad with their SU friends may have felt excluded when those friends bonded abroad. “People see it as my friend and I, because we did everything together,” Sarah explained. “They would feel left out if we would bring up a funny story from Australia. Some people make a point for us to know that they don’t want to hear about it.” Through these interactions, Sarah realized that “it’s definitely hard to relate when they weren’t there.” Then she laughed, “I mean it was six months of our lives! It’s kind of hard not to talk about it!” Riley found it challenging to fully relay to her friends what the study abroad experience had meant to her. She explained that it is “hard to explain in a couple of sentences how it was” or to “pack 10 weeks’ worth of experiences” into a brief conversation.

With peers not fully understanding the significance of the study abroad experience or the ways that it had changed them, many students naturally turned to other study abroad participants for comfort and understanding. Randy believed that the friendships with other students who had
studied abroad are “so genuine because you all experienced something than nobody else can relate to.”” Sarah explained this phenomenon further:

Crazy stuff happens, I feel like, when you are in a different country. You definitely have that connection with them, just because they were pit in that same situation. And it almost seems like you are all in that same matured place.

Eileen found comfort with other study abroad participants because “even if they don’t understand the culture aspect of your story, they’re still going to want to hear it, because they know that it’s hard to relay that experience.” For this reason, she believed that “you’re more likely to have a great conversation about study abroad with someone else who has also studied abroad.”

Those participants who had studied abroad with other SU students therefore had the unique advantage of being able to bring their study abroad friends home with them. Randy’s social circles changed as a result. He explained, “I just have more in common with these people now.” Likewise, Elizabeth and her study abroad friends combined their social networks. She believed that this was a very beneficial change for all involved. “Everyone has a connection because of our core connection which has just spread outside of that,” she explained. Nathan agreed, “The people that studied abroad…you grow closer to them because you have that base that your friendship has always been on, but then you have more to add to it.”

Building diverse relationships post study abroad.

Upon returning to the “bubble,” several participants have made a conscious effort to build more diverse friendships. “Now that I am back on campus, I am surrounded by so many different ethnicities. I desire to reach out and learn something new about them,” Michelle said. Ariel
believed that with her international friends at SU, “you never run out of anything to talk about because there’s just so many differences. I love hanging out with them! I think they’re great.”

Several participants found themselves drawn to foreign students studying abroad at SU because they remember all too well how challenging it was to adapt to a foreign culture. “I’m more interested now because I can relate. Before, I wouldn’t have thought anything about it. Now, I’m like, ‘She’s from Spain! I wonder how she feels!’” Scout explained. Ashley agreed, “I immediately want to be their friend because if I were to be back over there, I’d want people to welcome me in despite where I’m from.” Table 26 contains additional examples of participant comments about the desire to help international students.

**Summary.**

The third theme, *Life is all about the people you meet*, focused on the significance of relationships during and after the study abroad experience. Several aspects of study abroad relationships were explored, including: how participants built relationships abroad, and the characteristics and meaningfulness of these relationships. The theme also discussed the process of sustaining home and study abroad friendships, both during and after studying abroad. Finally, the theme explored participants’ efforts at building diverse relationships post study abroad.
Table 26  
*The post study abroad desire to help and be close to international students.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>Any way that I can help them out and make them feel more at home here, I would love that. They’re scared to death. I was!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>I’ve become more integrated [in the lives of] the kids who were here studying abroad. We hang out and [are] language partners and will go out to dinner. The first time I studied abroad I was an outsider over there. It makes you realize how they feel when they come over here, so I definitely tried to get more involved with Chinese kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>Whenever I meet international students on the SU campus, it makes me light up because I remember studying abroad and I know what it’s like. My new international friends and I were able to achieve real substance in our exchange.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallie</td>
<td>I’m trying to reach out more, because I know how it is. I would not have been opposed – if I was back in Freshman year – living with a foreign student for a semester. You learn so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>After being abroad, you see those people and you want to reach out and go like, “Hey, let me show you around.” Like, let me give you an experience that you might have not had just walking around by yourself. Because people did that to me and I was so grateful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>I’m more likely to go up to someone if they are struggling or lost or look very confused and say, “Do you need some help?” Because I know what it’s like to not know what’s going on. I don’t think I would have done that a year ago. I would just let them walk around looking like they are lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>[I am] reaching out to international students because I understand how scary it is to be somewhere where you just don’t speak the language very well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>It made me a little more empathetic. Now that I am on the other side of that, I can see how it is difficult to cross that [barrier].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>I felt so uncomfortable being an international student in Germany and I had five people with me from my school. They usually come here knowing just one or two people from the entire country. I was only there for three weeks, and they’re here for a whole semester. It instilled in me a drive to help international students. I’m going to try to make them feel as comfortable as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I grew more than I can ever remember.

“I grew more than I can ever remember,” Riley shared as she summed up her summer as a design intern in Spain. For Riley, the summer was more personally challenging than she could have imagined. “It has really changed me, in many, many amazing ways.” Natalie agreed, “I definitely was an enhanced person after I came back.” Natalie and Riley were certainly not the only participants who felt changed in some way after studying abroad. While describing the many ways that she had changed, Sarah suggested, “I don’t think that one thing really helped me grow. I think it was everything.” The current theme will explore participant comments related to the meaningfulness of the study abroad experience to their psychosocial growth and development. It should be noted that although career developmental changes are partially addressed under the psychosocial change areas below, changes in participants’ career decision-making and ambition will be discussed in the final theme, I’m more confident in my ability to be successful.

Areas of perceived psychosocial change.

During the interview, participants were asked to discuss the ways that the study abroad experience may have informed, changed, or reinforced their personal growth and development. In analyzing interview data, 11 chief change areas emerged. Table 27 offers a comprehensive summary of these areas of perceived psychosocial change in the order of most to least common among participants. The number and percentage of participants who experienced change in each of the areas is indicated in total and by gender. Each of these change areas will be discussed there following.
Table 27
Areas of perceived psychosocial change experienced while studying abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of perceived psychosocial change</th>
<th>Total #</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>% Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and interpersonal skills</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional flexibility</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence and self-confidence</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence and self-reliance</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability / ability to handle unanticipated situations</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of self, self-esteem and self-acceptance</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance for other lifestyles and beliefs</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of place in global community</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gains in knowledge.

“[It] impacted me just wanting to know just for the sake of knowing, and not being ignorant on a subject if I was going to [have] an opinion about it,” Laney suggested. With only one exception, all participants explicitly spoke of gaining knowledge and skills in one or more of the following areas while studying abroad: (a) knowledge about the host country, (b) language skills, (c) subject-specific knowledge, and (d) knowledge useful for their future career. All of the male participants felt confident that they had gained knowledge, while only one of the female participants reported no such gains explicitly.

Seventy-five percent of participants felt as if they had gained knowledge about the country where they had lived and studied. Ariel suggested, “I learned a lot about something I really didn’t know anything about. I didn’t know about the troubles in Northern Ireland [or that] it was a separate country.” Learning took place both through formal curricula and outside of the classroom through traveling and engaging with others. Those who took classes about the history
and culture of their host countries were much more understanding and appreciative of their socio-cultural surroundings. In Randy’s own words:

All the things you saw on the street that you didn’t understand, you came to class and learned why it is the way it is. It is so much easier to relate to. If I didn’t have that class to tell me why [or] what was going on, I wouldn’t have any idea. You have respect for why they are that way.

Some students were glad to finally be able to see firsthand examples of what they had been studying in SU textbooks. Nathan suggested, “You can study about China all you want here, but you aren’t experiencing the culture. So you go to China and keep studying about China and it’s like, ‘Oh! Well now that makes sense!’” Kate has been able to apply the knowledge she gained about South Africa to many parts of her post study abroad curriculum at SU. “Something about South Africa connects to everything. In every lecture I’m just like, ‘Oh yeah, the South African constitution says this…and…”’ She believes that this connection is very beneficial. John agreed that the knowledge he has gained brings “a unique quality” to his academic sophistication. “I enjoy being able to say, ‘this is what qualifies my opinion,’ or ‘this is why I chose this method.’”

One participant decided to forego sightseeing and learning about the country she was in until she could revisit it one day as a tourist. For Natalie, the experience was all about having carefree fun with her newfound friends, living in the moment. Though she was happy with the outcome of her study abroad experience, she did think that her father “was kind of disappointed that I didn’t take full advantage.” She traveled frequently, though she did not purposefully learn about the place or culture during her adventures. “I’d be like, ‘Okay, I’m in Barcelona!’ but I
couldn’t even point it out on a map. I’d be like, ‘I don’t know where Spain is.”’ Natalie was the only participant who reported no gains in host country knowledge while abroad.

Nearly 63 percent of participants also reported gains in subject-specific knowledge, usually as a result of classes they took while abroad. While in England, Jim chose to take classes that were not offered at SU. “I took some classes on the history of graphic design and learned about some stuff from the British point of view of graphic design that was really interesting.” He found those classes particularly interesting because it gave him “a different perspective from what I get here.” Billy was equally fascinated by the international business classes he took abroad and believed that he had gained information that “you can’t get from your professors [at SU] who aren’t natives of that country.” Jacques also found it valuable to gain a new perspective from his professors abroad. “I had only seen it from the American side of things, so that was really cool,” he explained.

Nearly sixty percent of participants reported gains in foreign language skill and fluency. Growth in this area was attributed to the experience of language immersion, which most often necessitated language practice both within and outside of the classroom. “Being submersed in the language, I feel like my Spanish vocabulary and knowledge of the language just shot up exponentially,” Nick said. Elizabeth explained, “Being forced to speak German is the best way to learn. Being in a situation where you just had to get what you are trying to say across – even if it is simple or wrong – helps you move along.” Jacques thought that he learned most when “I was at a bar and just playing drinking games with a bunch of French guys because you lose the fear.” Ricky believed that the language immersion experience “helped my understanding and fluency” and gave him the confidence to know that “what I’m saying works and is right.”
Nearly thirty-eight percent of participants believed that they had gained knowledge abroad that will be helpful for their future career. Though many thought that fluency in a foreign language would boost their resume and be helpful in the workplace, practical, career-specific knowledge was gained. While in China, Billy networked with small business owners who shared the realities of the international business industry with him. Billy found these exchanges very valuable because “if you [want] go into international business you need to understand how business operates in that particular country because it varies from country to country.” Kate believed that her experiences in South Africa will “forever shape my thinking on public policy and where I go next. I now have a better understanding of the importance of history and place and the modern implications of how people live and the problems they are facing.” Likewise, Jim has applied the knowledge he gained abroad to his graphic design aesthetic:

I study Graphic Design [which] is all about looking at the world around you and taking things in and synthesizing that into design. It was really fascinating to me to see some of the design of other countries. I do think my design work has gotten better since I’ve been over there.

Social and interpersonal skills.

As to social and interpersonal skills, 92.5 percent of participants discussed a belief that they had become more adept at interacting with diverse individuals. This was the single biggest change area for male participants (100%), and the fourth biggest among female participants (91%). Participants believed that they had become more adept at communicating and collaborating with others as they built friendships and shared experiences. Belinda learned that to effectively engage with others, “you just have to be sweet and kind and listen, and that way it is
so much harder for people to be rude to you.” Kate learned that effective communication requires “learning to meet people where they are.” She shared the significance of this lesson:

I think I am more aware than ever before that I have to make a conscious effort if I’m going to learn about a culture or a place or a person that is different from myself. I have to meet them where they are coming from.

Participants also believed that they had learned about diverse cultural systems and had adapted to them as best they could. “Trying to be sociable with foreign people, there’s a language barriers and a social barrier, anything from gestures to things you talk about,” Steve explained. Kevin learned that there is value in trying to overcome these barriers and “how much just a little bit of effort into trying to live within their culture and not bring your culture over” can mean to people from other cultures. “It’s all about having an open mind and starting off with a blank slate, one step at a time,” he stated. Growth in the area of social and interpersonal skills was discussed in greater detail under the third theme, *Life is all about the people you meet.*

*Emotional flexibility.*

Interview data revealed that ninety percent of participants had showed gains in emotional flexibility. This growth area was more prominent among female participants (96%) than their male counterparts (82%). As discussed under a previous theme, living outside of the “bubble” usually brought its fare share of challenges. Participants were charged with overcoming obstacles and making day to day decisions without the support of familiar support networks. In this often overwhelming process, participants also had to learn to manage and control their emotions flexibly. They had to find ways to comfort themselves, whether it meant talking themselves through an unfamiliar situation, or leaning on new or existing friendships. In the middle of a
crisis, Ross learned how to “suck it up really quick, ‘cause crying wasn’t going to get me anywhere!” To comfort herself, Ashley learned to “step back from the situation and say, ‘It could be so much worse and in a week this probably isn’t going to be that big of a deal.’” Similarly, Randy realized that “it’s not going to be as bad as you initially think. Just sit, think about it for a second, and then do the action.” Belinda agreed, “You can’t stress out because then you’ll never get anywhere. You just have to keep an open mind and a positive attitude.”

Many participants shared how challenging it was to be faced with time by themselves - sometimes truly for the first time in their lives. Annie’s host mother worked all day, and Annie found it “kind of a challenge to entertain myself and be alone like that! I definitely am a lot better with that now.” Likewise, Ariel stated, “I learned how to be okay with being alone. I learned that even though I don’t like that, I can deal with that.” Mike believed that “when you’re alone is when you’re most vulnerable,” leading to positive outcomes for a few participants who opted to use the time for self-discovery. Ross believed that the time alone “helped me a lot just dealing with myself and getting over a lot of things.” Riley agreed, “in that loneliness I grew so much and I learned a lot. I got to dig back to past things that I never allowed myself to feel and face being alone.”

Upon their return home, many participants believed that the experience had left them with a greater sense of emotional well-being. After a period of emotional self-discovery abroad, Riley learned “that life is a journey and that it will go up and down. You may not know what is around the next corner. That experience in Spain helped me fight through fears and gave me a new perspective.” Likewise, Ashley shared, “I’m less anxious. It helped calm me down.” Mike agreed, “I don’t let the little things bother me as much.”
Competence and self-confidence.

Upon returning from studying abroad, 87.5 percent of participants felt proud of their accomplishments and more confident in themselves. This held true for 96 percent of all female participants (making it their second biggest change area) and 76 percent of their male counterparts. “Once you overcome the challenges, you feel so good! And then you are this person you never thought you would be. I’m definitely proud of it. I’m proud of who I am becoming, and who I remained,” Jane stated. John felt similarly about the work he did as an intern on a fund accounting team in Ireland. “For all the stress and worry that it caused at the time, I came home every day feeling like I had done something significant and was proud of it.” Mary-Anne believed that “going to another country all by myself was probably the most brave thing I have ever done. I’m really proud of myself.” She was also proud of her academic achievements. “I got an A in my class. I felt successful! I felt really good about that because it’s an internationally renowned school.”

The sense of pride usually also meant a boost in self-confidence and a stronger internal locus of control. “If I can get through five hours of intensive German class with non-English speaking teachers, what can’t I do?” Elizabeth laughed. Similarly, Ariel believed that, “It gave me confidence that I’ll land on my feet. I might get knocked down, but I’ll figure it out and it’ll be okay.” John believed that the study abroad experience “gave me that, ‘I can do this!’ experience. It made me realize the value in trying to pursue things and not thinking that you can’t.” Similarly, the experience made Mary-Anne realize “that I can do big things,” while Sarah felt as if “I can overcome more now.”
After overcoming many external and personal obstacles, participants felt confident in their ability to solve problems and to handle complex or unanticipated situations. “College really is about becoming someone who can make it for themselves in the world. Studying abroad intensified that,” Jim explained. Elizabeth believed, “I have a background in multiple problem-solving because of studying abroad that will carry on for the rest of my life in [my] career, in everything.” Ricky agreed, “Things are going to be all right in pretty much any situation. I can take care of myself.”

*Independence and self-reliance.*

Nearly eighty-three percent of participants believed that the study abroad experience helped them to gain independence and confidence in their ability to be self-reliant. This held true nearly equally for male (82%) and female (83%) participants. For many participants, the study abroad experience was the first time that they were unable to turn to their parents for help in everyday decisions and actions. “Being thrusted [sic] into a country without your parents, without your immediate network of friends, you’re basically there by yourself,” Ross explained. He believed that it helped him to learn “that I’m much more self-reliant than I thought I was.” Eileen agreed, “You’re living in a foreign country, you’re basically an adult. You have to get it together and you can’t call mom and ask her directions to the supermarket. You have to go out and find it yourself.” Mike suggested, “Going abroad makes you realize that you are a damn grownup! My parents were across the ocean. What the hell were they going to do if something happened to me? Nothing. They couldn’t.”

Lauren described the struggles of learning to buy her own groceries and getting used using public transportation. “I’ve never taken a taxi in my life!” she laughed. “It took a long time
to adjust to living on my own.” Ariel suggested that the experience of facing these daily challenges in a foreign country “helped me grow up [and] to become okay with being on my own and graduating and being independent and knowing what I want to do. I feel like it really made me a stronger person. That I’d be okay.” Laney agreed that “figuring out how to live in a big European city without a car [or] any knowledge of the language” helped her to learn “a lot about how independent I can be and what I can get through on my own.”

*Adaptability and the ability to handle unanticipated situations.*

Among participants, eighty percent believed that the study abroad experience reinforced their ability to be adaptable and to handle unanticipated situations. Female participants in particular seemed to experience the most change in this area (87%), while only 71 percent of male participants addressed this topic specifically. While abroad, participants often faced many unanticipated situations without the assistance of familiar support systems. They learned to make quick decisions and to adapt as best they could. Jane considered study abroad to be “a push out into the deep end, and then I had to learn how to swim.” Forrest agreed, “You are constantly thrown new things that you’ve never seen before, you have to adapt.”

Steve believed that living in a foreign country helped him to learn “how to respond to unexpected situations, to make quick decisions when you don’t have a lifeline to call.” Several participants believed that their newfound adaptability will be beneficial in the workplace and other areas of life. “Learning to adjust to things on the fly, just to go with things, I figured my flexibility will help me with any context in life.” Ricky also believed that having the study abroad experience on his resume will show employers that he can adapt to anything. “When I go to work I’m not going to have any idea what I’m doing, where I am, so the ability to adapt to a
new situation…you learn that when you study abroad.” Ariel agreed that starting a new job would be just as uncertain as embarking on a study abroad adventure. “I didn’t know what I was doing in Dublin either and I figured it out within a week or two. The adaptation skills and the fast learning skills, those two things will help me out in the future.”

*Sense of self, self-esteem, and self-acceptance.*

Three quarters of participants believed that the study abroad experience strengthened their sense of self, self-esteem and self-acceptance. This was especially true among female participants (87%). Male participants did not describe change in this area as commonly, though it still rang true for 65 percent of this group. Participants often used nonspecific sentences (e.g., “I learned a lot about myself”) to describe positive growth in their identity formation. However, some participants, like Mike, were able to be much more articulate. “I’m a surfer, that’s who I’ve been since I was 10 years old. I kind of lost that. Going abroad really brought that back to me and lead me to think about who I was as a person.” Upon returning home, Mike had decided to live true to himself. “Why change for other people? I’m going to do me, and if people don’t like that, who cares?”

Several other participants also shed their self-doubt and the need for reassurance or approval. “I’m an atheist,” Madison stated firmly. “Before it would have been harder for me to say that, growing up in a really religious culture. As far as caring what other people think, I’m over it. I’m not doing that anymore. I am who I am.” When Jane was asked what her biggest personal benefit was of studying abroad, she replied, “I think it just reinstated who I am in this world. I think it was the sense of self, the sense of who I am and who I am coming to be.”
As participants learned about other cultures, they often also reflected upon their place within their own culture. Miguel became aware of his socio-cultural identity in conversation with others. “People will tell you stuff about your culture that you never knew. You reassess everything, because it is not only that you are challenging yourself, but your whole culture is challenged.” Laney shared a similar experience, “Without even realizing I was doing it, I was reevaluating who I was in this community, who I was in my family, what type of friend I was, and what type of friend I wanted to be.” Through her deep appreciation of the South African people and their culture, Kate was able to see her own family and upbringing in a new way that allowed her to accept her past. “I learned how to be more comfortable with myself and who I am, where I have come from, and the things that have shaped me leading up to now.”

Participants felt good about themselves after the study abroad experience, boosting their self-esteem. “I feel confident in who I am and what I have done and where I go next,” Miriam stated proudly. She believed that a strong sense of self will be beneficial for her future career. “It’s a better way for me to be, especially wanting to do teaching, because I always get frustrated with teachers who can’t control a classroom,” she explained. Likewise, Riley felt that the lessons she learned about herself will carry on into her future career. “I really realized that if [Riley] comes alive and I take care of her and really focus on me, then I’m going to be better for other people.”

*Tolerance for other lifestyles and beliefs.*

While engaged in diverse friendships abroad, participants often gained a new perspective that was more accepting of lifestyles and belief systems that were different from their own. In total 67.5 percent of participants (70% of females; 65% of males) believed that they had become
more accepting of diversity after studying abroad. “Often times when we’re criticizing other countries and cultures, it’s hard to accept anything other than what we would do,” Nathan suggested. “Living in that culture and coming to understand it more helps you see the other side of their perspective.” Steve agreed, “There’s a lot of different lifestyles that people live that are okay.” Kevin carried this understanding home with him after studying abroad:

You see people and things here that you might have looked at as odd, or weird, or dumb [before], but you’ve been exposed to all these different things being abroad - so many nationalities and ethnicities - that you come back and you feel like there isn’t anything that can surprise you. And you don’t want to jump back into those stereotypes that you might have had beforehand.

As participants grew more tolerant of diversity, they often also had to adjust their belief and value systems to accommodate these changed. “Though I am somewhat set in my values, I started to embrace people, traditions, or beliefs that is different than what I am accustomed to,” Michelle explained. “More and more I learn to have a multicultural perspective in life. I am no longer stuck in one way of thinking. I am less judgmental and stereotypical.” Ricky has learned “to not be so quick to make judgments” and to allow himself “to see there are different opinions and views about things. Not one or the other is wrong or better. It’s just people are different, not necessarily bad or good, just different.” For Rosa, this was a very valuable lesson. “I don’t think I understood before the negative effects that I had on other people when I was so black and white,” she explained. “I really hurt people.”

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Awareness of place in the global community.

Nearly sixty-three percent of participants (61% of females; 65% of males) felt more aware of their place in the global community upon returning from studying abroad. For some, it was the first time that they had fully understood the interconnectedness between countries. “We need to be aware of what’s going on on a global level,” Ross stated. “The choices we make here in America will affect our counterparts. We’re all here together. We all need to work together to learn from each other.” Table 28 gives additional examples indicating participants’ growing awareness of the global community.

Several participants were shocked to learn how informed people of other countries were about America and the world. “Europeans are so much more educated than Americans are,” Nick suggested. “They know their stuff!” Since studying abroad, several participants have been making conscious efforts to be better global citizens and to be more informed about the world around them. “I read a newspaper from South Africa online a couple of times a week. I just realize that our perspective as Americans is super limited. So I want to make an effort on my part,” Kate explained.

For many participants, a growing awareness of their place in the global community inspired a desire to help people in parts of the world who are less fortunate. “I think one thing I learned about myself is that maybe I don’t give always give back as much as I should,” Annie said. “The community service [in South Africa] has really inspired me to give back a lot more to the community.” Several participants shared dreams of working for the Peace Corps. “I definitely have a deeper appreciation for people who live in poverty. Living [in Costa Rica] for 6 weeks washing my own clothes, it made me want to join the Peace Corps.”
Table 28
*Globalmindedness.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>I think I’ve learned a lot about the world and the way things work in different places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>It made me much more open-minded about the world in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>I think it helps you develop a sense of where Americans fit in the global hierarchy. It helps you have different opinions about what’s going on in the world other than just what the American media shows you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>We’re not exposed to some of the things that happen in the world. Once we come to that realization, we unlock a whole new level of capabilities and opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>It was a broadening experience. I came back with a much larger perspective of just how the world works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallie</td>
<td>[Countries] should learn from each other and not make as many mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laney</td>
<td>It just inspired me to know what’s going on in the world and to be aware. To make my own opinions and to be informed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
<td>In today’s world, when everything is so global, if you don’t have these kind of experiences, eventually you will be considered ignorant. So you might as well get onboard now because you can’t just live in your own little world. You have to be aware.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>It opened my eyes to different problems or situations that people face around the world. To be able to see a little bit firsthand of global economy has helped me to relate to different citizens of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Our world isn’t just centered on us. There’s so much more going on. It’s a much bigger story than just ours. Ours is a little story.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Others chose to get involved in projects at a local level first in order to “start creating change in our world,” as Ross put it. While traveling abroad, Madison realized how much more could be done locally to preserve the planet. Though her peers at SU have not always been receptive, Madison has fought for environmental change on the SU campus and in the community. “I care enough to be embarrassed and hold a sign up and have dumb people say stuff to me. There are huge underlying problems that people don’t know or care about.”
Understanding the meaningfulness of the study abroad experience.

Upon returning from their study abroad experiences, most participants felt changed in one way or another. As explored heretofore, participants experienced change in such areas as emotional flexibility, social and interpersonal skills, adaptability, self-confidence, and competence - to name just a few. Though most participants seemed aware of change, they didn’t always fully understand it. “When I came back here, it was weird because I felt very, very changed and I couldn’t really put my finger on it,” Laney explained. As participants returned home, they faced the unique challenge of rediscovering their place within a mostly unchanged “bubble.” “I came back and I was like, ‘This is the same place! What?’ It was so surreal. It’s weird that it’s the same place and I’m looking at it from such a different viewpoint,” Ariel explained.

For some, fitting naturally into the roles and routines of their predeparture selves were easier than for others. “I just plugged myself right back in when I came back” Jacques said. However, he did admit that he experienced “more culture shock entering the United States from being abroad than going to France.” Several other participants commented on the challenge of readapting to American culture after having adapted to lifestyles of the host culture. “It was weird for the first month or two when I got back,” Ricky said. Besides readapting culturally, participants also had to adjust to “business as usual” (as Jerry called it) - where classes were back to normal, there were no more big adventures planned for weekends, and newfound study abroad friends were continents away. John opined that while abroad, “It was so much all at once, so much to accomplish. Coming back and settling in, sitting in the classroom as opposed to what I had been doing [abroad] was just not the same.”
In the midst of all these challenges, participants also often experienced a lack of support and understanding from friends who had not studied abroad. Kate explained that “being in a place for an entire semester, you feel like you saw and learned so much but you don’t know how to communicate that to your friends here.” Kiley agreed, “People just don’t get it.” Some, like Kallie and Sarah, even faced hostility from those who were seemingly jealous that they were unable to share in their adventures. Mary-Anne had a similar experience, “A lot of my friends were just straight up jealous that they couldn’t afford to take a trip like that.” Jacques shared how his friends reacted upon his return from a summer in France:

People always ask, “How was studying abroad? How was France?” and I always say, “It’s just amazing!” And then it’s like they don’t really want to hear what I have to say. Like, I’ll try to talk about it and they’re like, “Uh-huh, Uh-huh, and my summer was fun, too.” And I was like, “Well, you don’t really understand what I’m trying to tell you.”

Being unable to fully share their experiences with others, participants often faced the challenge of making sense of these experiences alone. It is not surprising then, that most participants seemed to lack clear understanding of the meaningfulness of the study abroad experience in terms of their psychosocial growth and development. Most participants were not particularly articulate at the outset of the interview. Several questions asked participants to describe the ways that the study abroad experience had informed, changed, or reinforced their growth and development. To these questions, participants often answered, “I don’t know!” One participant admitted, “I guess I haven’t thought about these things as much as I should have.” It is not surprising, then, that interview responses often seemed like an unedited stream of consciousness as participants jumped from one topic to another, reliving the memories of their
study abroad experiences. “I haven’t really talked about it all that much,” Scout explained. “I’ve talked about my experiences, but I haven’t really talked about how I feel about it.”

Only a few participants were able to clearly articulate the meaning of their experiences effectively. Without exception, these were participants who had taken the time to reflect upon their experiences – either through conversations with others upon their return, or through writing in journals or blogs while abroad. Kate, for instance, turned to her academic advisor to “talk it out.” She explained, “As soon as I came back, I sat in her office for hours and we talked about everything. Now I’m more comfortable talking through it all.” Several participants used their quiet times abroad to reflect upon their experiences as they were occurring. “I had a lot of time to think about everything: myself, my life, where I was, and what I was doing,” Jane said. She also kept a journal to make sense of her experiences. “There, I wrote a lot of beautiful things, even though some of them were more sad, they were beautiful.”

It was not uncommon for participants to discover the meaning of their experiences during the interview process - several months after studying abroad. For instance, at the outset of the interview, Natalie had said, “I don’t know why I never really felt closure with study abroad. I feel like one day I woke up in Italy, and the next day I took a plane home and woke up in my room.” As Natalie shared her experiences, she suddenly exclaimed, “I just thought of that! – indicating that she had suddenly made sense of her experiences in a new way. “I mean, all this stuff, a year later!” she said, excited that she now has gained a better understanding of the meaningfulness of her experiences. Though Natalie’s growing understanding was very apparent, other participants gained awareness in more subtle ways. For instance, several participants
moved from early “I don’t know!” answers to more clearly articulated and insightful answers as the interview progressed.

**Summary.**

The fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, explored the areas of perceived psychosocial change associated with the study abroad experience. These included: (a) narrowing or solidifying career choice, (b) professional skill building and career preparation, (c) confidence in the ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals, (d) formulating a career plan with an international focus, (e) change in academic and career ambition, and (f) changes in work ethic. The theme also discussed the ways that participants were able to make sense of their growth and development.

**I’m more confident in my ability to be successful.**

“I’m a great deal more confident in my ability to be successful because of this experience,” John said. Likewise, Lauren stated, “I’m excited about going out into real life. I used to be scared about what I was going to do after college. Now, I’ll be like, ‘I’m ready!’” This theme will explore participants’ perceived academic and career development during and after study abroad participation. Changes in participants’ career choices, professional skills, confidence in mobility, ambition, and work ethic will be explored.

During the interview, several questions were asked specifically related to participants’ perceived career development before, during, and after the study abroad experience. Based on this information, six major change areas were discovered specifically related to career development. These included: (a) narrowing or solidifying career choice, (b) professional skill building and career preparation, (c) confidence in the ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals, (d) choosing a career plan with an international focus, (e) change in ambition, and (f) change in
work ethic. Table 29 serves as a summary of the perceived changes in participants’ career development. The total number and percentage of participants who reported change in each of these areas is listed. Percentages are also displayed by gender.

Table 29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived career development change area</th>
<th>Total #</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>% Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrowing/solidifying career choice</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional skill building and career preparation</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career plan with an international focus</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in academic and career ambition</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in work ethic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Narrowing or solidifying career choice.*

During the interview, participants were asked to describe their career goals prior to studying abroad. Participants’ answers naturally led them to also discuss their post-study abroad career goals. In comparing this information, it was discovered that 95 percent of participants perceived changes in their career goals which they attributed at least in part to the study abroad experience. This held true for 91 percent of female participants and 100 percent of male participants. Changes included: (a) discovering new career interests while abroad, (b) narrowing career choices, and (c) solidifying existing career choices.

*Discovering new interests and career options abroad.*

Sixty-five percent of participants believed that they had discovered new career interests and career options while studying abroad. As to broadened career options, Annie stated, “I think that it opens up a lot more options for me of things that I would not have thought about in the past.” Jim agreed, “More options are open to me, or I know more about [them] than I did
previously. It kind of opened my eyes to different possibilities that I didn’t know a lot about before.” Kallie felt liberated by her broadened career perspective:

Most people would be like, “Oh, I’m graduating, I need to just go ahead and get my graduate degree in the same thing I got my undergraduate degree in,” or “I just need to find a job back home.” I’m like, “No!” I’m going to look at grad schools, I’m going to look at law schools, I’m going to look at jobs, and I’m going to see what the best option is.

Several participants unexpectedly discovered new career interests, directly impacting their career choice. Reed’s study abroad experience in Korea sparked new interests which helped him to solidify his career choice. Prior to studying abroad, Reed was very unsure about what specific direction to pursue in the public policy field. “When we went to Korea, the world was leaps and bounds advanced in technology, and I was just driven by it and passionate about it,” he said excitedly. “I was just amazed!” The experience left such an impression on him that sometime after studying abroad, he made the decision to focus on technology policy. Reed described his career plan, “I would like to end up one day working with a Korean company, specifically Hyundai, Samsung, or LG. So I’m going to DC and work as a policy advisor for those corporations.” He is hopeful that this position would also allow him to “go back and forth to Korea” so that he may continue to travel.

For Miriam, experiencing German academe first hand unexpectedly showed her that her lifelong dream of being a professor in Germany was not a good fit. “I didn’t have the best experiences with my teachers,” she explained. Miriam realized that she is not willing to teach “in a system where I can’t be supportive of my students.” Though she admits this revelation was
disappointing, she was glad that “it gave me clarity on what I wanted.” While abroad, Miriam “learned a lot more about linguistics and got really interested in people”, and she decided to pursue a Doctoral degree in Sociolinguistics in order to be a professor in the United States. “I just kind of did a complete personal shift in what I wanted to do with my life,” she said. Though this shift was unexpected, Miriam is excited about her future. “I’m glad I found that out now, as opposed to five to ten years from now when I was in the system and just miserable and didn’t have another option,” she explained.

Faced with the prospect of exciting new career interests, 22.5 percent of participants adjusted their academic plan upon returning from studying abroad by changing or adding a major or a minor. For some, this meant having to delay graduation in order to complete additional degree requirements. Of the forty research participants, 17.5 percent were fifth-year seniors. One participant said, “When I came back I was in the 2011 graduating class, not the 2010 class anymore.” However, this participant was not discouraged by a later graduation date. Instead, the participant was thankful to have identified a fulfilling career path.

*Narrowing career choice.*

Among participants, 57.5 percent reported narrowing their career choices after studying abroad. While this was happenstance for some, Miguel studied abroad with the intention of choosing between two career options. “I was trying to figure out if I wanted to go to grad school or if I wanted to go get a job. I just went to study abroad with an open mind, trying to make a choice between those two options,” Miguel explained. While studying abroad, he discovered that he is particularly interested in Sociology “just because it was so interesting to be there and to have my identity challenged.” Consequently, Miguel decided that he wants to go to graduate
school to become a professor in Sociology. “I want to research and study race relations,” he stated.

Prior to studying abroad, Ross knew that he wanted to work in Higher Education and had set the career goal of pursuing a Masters degree in Higher Education Administration. At the time, he wanted to focus on “helping the black community on college campuses. I was really gung ho about that.” However, through the study abroad experience, Ross gained greater clarity about his future. “After going to Germany and experiencing what it means to be a foreign exchange student, I [want to] work on diversity issues on campuses, making sure international students feel welcome.” Through a position in the International Programs office of a college campus, Ross hopes to “make sure that they leave our country, state, and school with a positive outlook.”

While studying abroad, Nathan narrowed his career interests by eliminating a possible career option. Nathan’s career goals during freshman year entailed being a politician who was “going to change the world.” After a long day of networking with Chinese businessmen, Nathan realized that “meeting people all day and going and always having a happy face on” was not what he wanted to spend his life doing. “I feel like personally I can make a lot bigger difference sitting at a desk and writing a report than going out and shaking hands all day, and asking my fellow congressmen to sign this bill,” he explained. After seeing China’s environmental problems firsthand, Nathan discovered an interest in environmental policy. He paired this with his interest in economics, and decided to focus his career on the environmental economics of China in order to seek solutions for such problems. “I think [study abroad] definitely helped me
find that future career. I don’t think I would be on this path at all without having studied abroad,” he said.

*Solidifying career choice.*

Several participants felt as if the study abroad experience reinforced their predeparture career choices. This was especially true for those following a degree program with an international focus. “I definitely think that it reinforced that I am very happy to be an international studies major,” Annie stated. “I’m very interested in it and it made my major come to life for me a little more.” Kallie’s dreams of working in the diplomatic core were solidified while living and learning abroad. “It just really reinforced that, ‘Hey, I love this!’ I mean, I will come back to the US and call it home, but I also love living over there and being able to learn different cultures and everything.”

A few participants’ career choices were reinforced in the classroom. “My personal writing during class really reinstated that I want to be a writer,” Jane stated. Jim agreed that his graphic design classroom experiences abroad “confirmed that I really enjoy what I’m doing.”

Those who pursued internships abroad had the unique opportunity to gain real-world experience in their chosen field, which often solidified their career choice. “Getting hands on experience in the particular field I would like to obtain a career in helped to reinforce that I wanted to do that,” Ariel said. Scout solidified her career choice while shadowing a psychologist in Costa Rica. “When I saw her interact with the kids, I was glad because it reassured me that that’s what I want to do too,” Scout stated. “It was just a good feeling to know that I am on the right path for me.”

Though some participants solidified their career choices during or shortly following study abroad, for others, study abroad was the catalyst that led them to reflect seriously upon their
career and life goals in a way that brought clarity some time after returning home. “I can’t think of a specific incident where I pondered my career goals [while abroad],” Eileen stated. “I probably thought more about it after I came back. I think the whole semester helped me to think about what I might want to do when I was done.” Elizabeth also did not clarify her career goals immediately following studying abroad, though it did spark the reflection process. “Afterwards, I really wanted to think of how I could fit what I am good at, what I am interested in, and all my strengths, and some German…how I could combine all of that,” she explained. After much thought, she was able to find a solution. “My dream career [is] to do marketing PR for a German car company in Germany, but if not, I would still live here and travel there.”

As participants became more certain of their career paths, they began to decide on specific steps that would help them to reach their goals. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) had plans of graduate school to further qualify themselves for their dream careers. Others, like Eileen, are seeking internships or temporary work experience abroad. “My goal is to go back to China after I graduate for a year with the same Chinese program to intern and then I will come home and take the Foreign Service exam.” Elizabeth shared her job search strategy, which includes relying on networking:

If I can find a course or an opportunity or the right connection, I’m going to use it.

Everyone who ever said, “Oh, I have a connection, my so-and-so…” I’m going to call them. I am still motivated to make it happen. I still want to work towards that.

It is not surprising that as participants became more comfortable with their career choices and the steps they will take to reach their career goals, they naturally felt more ready to move on to the next phase of their lives. “I feel for the first time ready to leave [SU]. I’m going to be
okay,” Kate stated proudly. Similarly, Lauren said, “I’m excited about real life. I used to be scared about what I was going to do after college. Now, I’m ready!” Jacques agreed, “I’m ready to get out of [SU]. I’m ready to leave here. It’s scary but it’s just another step, so I’ve just got to keep moving in the right direction and I’ll find where I’m going eventually.”

**Professional skill building and career preparation.**

Kate felt as if facing the many challenges abroad had taught her “the skills necessary for outside the bubble in the real world.” After analyzing interview responses, it became apparent that 90 percent of participants believed that the study abroad experience helped them to build skills that will prove useful for their future careers. This was the third biggest perceived psychosocial change area for male participants (94%), though 87 percent of their female counterparts also discussed change in this area. During the interview, participants were asked to describe the ways that the study abroad experience might have better prepared them for their future career. In analyzing participant responses to the aforementioned question, nine chief areas of career preparation emerged. These are summarized in Table 30.

**Interpersonal skills.**

Among participants, 35 percent believed that the study abroad experience helped them to build interpersonal skills that will be useful in a future career. “I think that I will be able to work with people better and understand my limits as a person and what I know I can contribute to a group,” Lauren explained. Scout also felt as if the study abroad experience helped her to “relate with different people” in the workplace. Similarly, Billy believed that he had learned how to “put myself in other people’s shoes and see where they’re coming from and understand their
background.” Forrest emphasized the value of learning these skills abroad. “They’re interpersonal skills that you’ve honed that you can’t really get in a classroom.”

Table 30
_Study abroad and career preparation._

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of career preparation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Billy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jacques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laney</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lauren</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michelle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Randy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real world experience that could serve as performance examples during job interviews</td>
<td>Annie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ariel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign language skills</td>
<td>Annie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eileen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume boosting / increased competitiveness of job applications</td>
<td>Annie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kallie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career self-efficacy useful for facing challenges in a future career</td>
<td>Ariel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jacques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater understanding of other parts of the world</td>
<td>Annie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Billy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kallie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Randy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence and self-reliance</td>
<td>Ashley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eileen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ricky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having something to talk about in business conversations.</td>
<td>Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kiley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natalie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants seemed aware of the importance of being able to relate to diverse individuals within the workplace. Forrest noticed that “there’s a lot of emphasis in some of the job descriptions that I’ve read...companies play on diversity.” Skills in this area would therefore be very valuable not only in the workplace but also during the job search process. “Being able to deal with other cultures is important no matter what you do,” John opined. While abroad, Mike
came to “understand that people are different.” He opined that this understanding will be invaluable “if I go into any field of business where I’m dealing with foreign companies or people in any way.” Randy also felt as if his “people skills” improved while abroad, which will be a great benefit in his future career. In his words:

> It helps you to relate better with all different types of people, because when you go in a workforce not everybody is going to be like you in a company. Everybody is going to be different, from different backgrounds. It helps you to understand people [and] get along with them.

*Real world experience.*

Thirteen participants (32.5%) believed that the study abroad experience provided them with real world experience that will be beneficial for a future career. Participants also believed that they would be able to draw from these experiences as performance examples during job interviews. Though those participants who completed internships abroad were in the unique position to build career-specific skills, others believed that overcoming the everyday challenges abroad built equally useful skills. “Study abroad definitely gave me the experience that I need to really do well at a lot of things that I want to do,” Laney stated. Some learned career-specific skills within the classroom. “I’ve gotten better in my graphic design,” Jim stated. “There are a lot of things about the study abroad experience that helped me.” Through her classes abroad, Jane, an aspiring writer, “got to expand my writing genre. Learning how to write a script was completely new.” Others learned more general skills, like organization and time management. “It helped me with being on time for things, because if you are two minutes late for something in Germany, you’ve missed it,” Ross said.
As to the benefit of an internship abroad, Ariel stated, “Study abroad definitely prepared me for my future career.” She explained, “Not only was I able to gain experience in the particular field I hope to have a career in, but I was also able to learn how to handle more responsibilities that come along with having a real job.” Ariel was thankful that her coworkers made her feel like a valuable part of the team. “They don’t just hire you for fun. They’re not going to hire you to make copies and get coffee. We had things to do, we did advertising campaigns.” John’s internship experience was equally valuable. “I’m going to graduate in May and I can’t imagine sitting [here] without being able to talk to people that I’m interviewing with and say, ‘I did this.’” He explained that now, in an interview, “instead of telling them that you’re proud of what you did for the intramural tennis team, you’re proud of what you did in Ireland, working for [a world-renowned company]. There’s a big difference there!”

Foreign language skills.

“The government needs people who can speak other languages,” Eileen said optimistically. As an International Studies major, Eileen was required to study abroad for at least one semester of language immersion. “Your skills improve so much when you study abroad if you let them.” With a career in the Foreign Service in mind, Eileen planned to return to China for a post graduate internship to further strengthen her language fluency. “Language learning forwards a career, because there is pretty much no job where learning another language isn’t going to be helpful,” Rachel said. Thinking about her career as a psychologist in a Spanish speaking country, Scout believed that learning “to not speak like you’ve learned [Spanish] from the textbook” will allow her clients “to take me more seriously and trust me more.”
Resume boosting.

“I think that a study abroad experience looks very good on the resume, and it looks good on applications,” Jane stated. “It’s life experience. It’s what helps you grow as a person.” John agreed, “Any employer is going to see on your resume a foreign country and that’s going to pique their interest. It’s absolutely necessary from a resume standpoint.” Mary-Anne chose to attend a world-renowned university abroad in order to “beef up my resume.” She saw several added benefits of having international experience within today’s global society:

If you come to the table at a job interview and say “I’ve already gone abroad and at least experienced another culture,” that gives you a leg up on people. It also shows that you took initiative. During your summer you took the opportunity to go and experience something that a lot of companies would value. Especially [with] expatriate programs, you want to be able to say, “I can do this. I’ve done it before, and I would be a good candidate because of all these reasons.”

Career self-efficacy.

As participants successfully faced the day-to-day challenges of living in a foreign culture, they built confidence in their abilities to be successful. This increase in self-confidence also carried over to other areas of participants’ lives, and influenced their attitudes towards their future career and life goals. “I think the confidence it gave me, that’s valuable for when I go [sic] be a part of the working world and labor force. Any employee needs to have confidence,” said Mary-Anne. This newfound career self-efficacy helped participants to believe that they can achieve their future goals. “I’m a great deal more confident in my ability to be successful
because of this experience,” John said. Likewise, Madison proudly stated, “It made me know that I can do anything!!”

While discussing their growth and development, participants sometimes spoke directly about how the study abroad experience might impact their future work life. Ross believed that any challenge he may face in the workforce would “pale in comparison” to the challenges he faced in Germany. He felt confident that he will now be able to “be calm in situations that challenge me and I can overcome that.” Similarly, the numerous challenges of an unsupervised internship in Spain taught Riley, “that I could do whatever someone would ask from me in a work setting.”

*Globalmindedness.*

“Now that the economy is global, you need to understand what’s going on in the world around you,” John stated. Several participants believed that their growing awareness of the global community will be beneficial to their future career. “You know, everything is going global,” said Randy. “Having this experience on my resume, when they see this when I interview they always bring it up.” Randy has found that employers are seeking individuals who are willing to take temporary positions abroad. “I’m more interested in that now than I was before I left,” he stated. “I think if you can come to the table at a job interview and say that I’ve already gone abroad and done things and experienced another culture, that gives you a leg up on other people,” Mary-Anne agreed. Similarly, Billy recognized the importance of study abroad in ensuring a global mindset for a future career:

If anyone is serious [about] not only doing international business, but anything revolved around globalization, you definitely need to go study abroad, because you can’t get it
from over here in the textbooks. You can’t get it from your professors, who aren’t natives of the country. You’ve got to go over there and immerse yourself in it.

*Independence and self-reliance.*

Nick believed that the study abroad experience “prepared me for any situation, whether it be in the workplace or in social circumstances, just being an environment completely different from your own.” Likewise, Riley believed that she “could do whatever someone would ask from me in a work setting” after she had to complete challenging projects unsupervised during her internship in Spain. “Madrid was really my first work experience in an office, but also as the only designer there, it put a lot of pressure and responsibility on me.” Riley overcame these challenges independently, and was thrilled to have the opportunity “to see what it would really be like to be a designer with real goals, real deadlines.” Having done an internship outside of her major field of study, Ariel felt as if the experience “reassured that I’ll figure things out,” no matter what the work challenge may be.

*Having something to talk about.*

Participants also considered the study abroad experience helpful for their future careers because it would offer them, as Kiley said, “things that I can talk about with people.” Kiley, an aspiring journalist, saw this as an especially valuable tool to build rapport with others during the interview process. Natalie already encountered a situation where she was able to use her study abroad experiences to ease tension at a business luncheon. “I had an internship this summer and my boss and I were going somewhere and we stopped and had lunch. I was like, ‘Okay! Forty year-old man…he’s not very nice…what are we going to talk about?’” When Natalie told him she had studied abroad in Italy, her boss was eager to also share stories about when he and his
wife vacationed there. “I was like, done! Now we had something to talk about.” As a tennis instructor, Jerry has used his experiences abroad to earn respect from his students. “That just puts them in their place, whenever they realize that, ‘Yes, you do have more experiences than I have.’ And so I guess that proves that study abroad is helpful whatever you do.”

**Ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals.**

Ninety percent of participants felt as if the study abroad experience had impacted their ability to be mobile in pursuit of future career and life goals. This was true for 91 percent of females, and 88 percent of male participants. For most (77.5%) this change was positive in the sense that they had gained confidence to pursue future opportunities away from home. “I want to get out of my bubble and move somewhere else even if I can’t go abroad right away,” Ashley said. “I feel like I’m happiest when I go on adventures now, and moving somewhere new is definitely a new adventure,” she explained. Kallie shared this sense of adventure, “I went to Career Services and said, ‘I’ll move anywhere, let’s just start looking at cool jobs!’” She thought that the study abroad experience “really prepared me to be able to move anywhere and to be flexible.” John agreed, “Before, I thought I was going to be in the South forever. Now, moving to Boston doesn’t scare me. I feel like I know a little more about adjusting now.” Additional comments regarding confidence in the ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals are summarized in Table 31.

Though most participants experienced a boost in confidence, a few participants (12.5%) came to understand just how much family and the comforts of home mean to them, causing them to become more apprehensive about being mobile in pursuit of future opportunities. Though Rachel still intends to work abroad for a few years, she explained that “to some extent, it may
make me a little more reticent about doing the things I plan to do.” After missing a large family reunion, Rachel was “surprised at just how sad I was.” She realized that being close enough to spend time with family is really important to her. “I have to be able to go there and to be able to see these people,” she said. Natalie has decided to remain close to home indefinitely. She explained:

Maybe somehow being away for so long, that is drawing me back [home]. I feel like maybe if I hadn’t gone to Italy I might want to look for a job in Nashville or something. But because I was far away, it makes me want to come back closer to home.

Table 31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>If I moved to a city where I didn’t know anybody, I will make friends and I will figure it out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>It made me know that I can go anywhere and I can do anything and I’m going to be okay. I’ll figure it out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary-Anne</td>
<td>It opened up the whole idea of I don’t really have to stay here in America. I can go anywhere!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>It instilled in me a desire to see other places and not just stay in my own spot. It made me more comfortable going to [an] unfamiliar place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>If I decide to move further away from my family, that won’t really bother me as much except me missing them. I don’t need anyone else to help me. I can do it by myself if need be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>When you get a job offer or go to graduate school, you’re going to have to move and surround yourself in a new environment and meet new people all over again. [Study abroad] was kind of a preview to that. It helped you learn what to do and what not to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>I was thinking about [working] in a different country. Now that I’ve done it, why not do it again? You know you can do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>The experience makes me want to get a job somewhere really crazy. I’ve done it before and I know there are difficulties, but I know I could do it and I would enjoy it, so I’m open to the idea of studying or working somewhere far away from here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Career plan with an international focus.

After studying abroad, 80 percent of participants chose to pursue career goals with an international focus. This included considering graduate study abroad or seeking long or short term employment abroad. Female participants seemed particularly drawn to living and working abroad (83%), when compared to male participants (76%). Among participants, 55 percent expressed a desire to live and work abroad temporarily before pursuing graduate study or starting a full-time career. Many expressed an interest to complete up to two years in the Peace Corps, while others expressed an interest to teach English abroad. From analyzing participants’ predeparture and post-study abroad career goals, it seemed as if the desire to postpone the working world was often not part of participants’ original career plans. Scout described how this career detour happened for her:

I have a deeper appreciation for people who live in poverty. Living there for 6 weeks, washing my own clothes, made me want to join the Peace Corps or something like that.

Studying abroad made me want to become a traveler.

Similarly, Annie felt “inspired to do something like living abroad for a year or two before I go to law school.” Knowing how challenging graduate study can be, Annie’s decision was driven by the reality that “it would not be feasible for me to do something like that again” at a later time. She believed that “at this point in my life I should do something that I could never do again.” Sharing similar beliefs, Ashley was willing to take nearly any opportunity that would allow her to live and work abroad again. “Something to get me back overseas for a little while, that’s my goal,” she stated.
At the time of interview, a few participants were in the process of applying for postgraduate internships abroad. “I considered trying to find internships abroad just because I wanted an excuse to travel again,” Nick admitted. Eileen hoped to win a prestigious internship with the same Chinese program that she had studied abroad with. The opportunity would allow her to fulfill the goal of living abroad for an extended period of time, and will also prepare her for the next step in her career - taking the Foreign Service exam. Forrest also found an internship opportunity abroad at “one of the world-renowned research centers” that would grant him the opportunity to live in France, practice his French, and gain experience in his field of study. Jacques viewed an internship or teaching position overseas as a way to avoid “having to pigeon hole myself in the United States,” Like others, Jacques did not have these career aspirations until after he studied abroad and learned of the many options available to him.

Another option that participants became aware of while studying abroad is the possibility of pursuing a graduate degree internationally. Interview data revealed that nearly half of all participants (45%) planned to pursue graduate study. Interestingly, at the time of interview, 67% of these participants were considering graduate study at an institution outside of the United States. Many, like Mary-Anne, were merely seeking another opportunity to live abroad (essentially, killing two birds with one stone), because “it’s just an experience I couldn’t get enough of.”

Just over half of all participants (52.5%) reported seeking careers that would allow for short or long term expatriate positions abroad. “After I studied abroad, I think I will always do something with an international theme in my life,” Eileen stated. “I don’t think I’ll be satisfied if I just stay in the States the rest of my life.” Jerry agreed, “I can see myself working some job that
requires me to travel all over the world. I would love that!” Billy didn’t always dream of an international career. “Before, I wanted to stay in the States and if I had to go overseas for a certain amount of time, that’s fine. But after being there for three months, I wouldn’t mind living over there at all,” Billy explained. “Hell yeah, send me over!” Mary-Anne said of the prospect of an expatriate position abroad. She added, “If I hadn’t done this beforehand, I think I’d be a lot more reserved about taking this kind of opportunity.”

*Changes in academic and career ambition.*

While abroad, participants often reassessed their personal values and priorities. Having experienced so many amazing things abroad, many participants, like Mike, came to understand that, “The most important thing to me is to be happy. I don’t need a million dollars.” Though some participants’ revelations about self took a different shape, most realized the importance of doing the things that hold meaning to them. For some, like Pope, it meant taking the time to have picnics in the park with friends and to simply enjoy life for all it has to offer. For others, like Madison, it meant devoting more time to the causes she believes in, and to prepare for a meaningful career.

Forty-five percent of participants experienced change in their academic and career ambition after studying abroad. This rang true for slightly more females (48%) than male participants (41%). After analyzing participant responses, it seems that upon returning from the study abroad experience, participants found themselves in one of two paths: (a) they were either more academically and professionally motivated than ever before, or (b) they were less interested in school and more interested in pursuing the simple joys of life. Not surprisingly, either path had significant consequences for future career goals.
As to gains in academic ambition, Mary-Anne said, “I feel like I’m more successful. After I got back was [sic] my best grades I’ve ever gotten.” Mary-Anne explained this phenomenon, “I think I was just more focused on doing well, in part due to being around people in London that were so motivated and smart.” Natalie shared a similar experience, “I guess it’s because I did everything 110%, being wild…I guess I just had to get everything out of my system. I came back and I was like, okay, I do want to study.”

It seems that the academic rigor of classes abroad often showed participants how much more they are capable of. “I guess it makes me strive harder because I was working so hard in my classes there,” Sarah explained. “So when I got back here, I wanted to make better grades because I was trying so hard over there and I’d make C’s and B’s.” Pope thought the timing of his study abroad was perfect. “It gave a definite motivation boost, since I was going into my senior year.” Scout agreed, “It’s my last year and it makes me want to get the best grades that I can. It definitely motivated me to get straight A’s and to get a good GRE.”

While some participants spoke at length about newfound academic motivation, others felt as if tasting what life has to offer outside of academe had in some sense sapped their academic focus. “This is going to sound really bad, but it kind of made me not care about school,” Belinda said guiltily. “I just want to graduate and travel more!” Lauren agreed, “I feel like my grades are not the most important thing. No one is going to care 10 years from now whether I had a 4.0 in college.” Kallie experienced a complete priority shift while abroad, perhaps also in part due to her parent’s passing. “I just learned, go do it. Do whatever you want to do at that moment because you are going to remember that. You are not going to remember the B you got on a test.”
Not surprisingly, whether participants returned academically and professionally focused had a profound impact on their career ambitions and readiness to graduate. Some were inspired and excited for their future careers. “When you’re over there you think, ‘My world is a bubble!’ and now there’s so much more that can be achieved,” Randy explained. Belinda agreed, “It set my goals that much higher. I want to make money to afford the lifestyle that I experienced for a few months.” Mary-Anne was also more driven to be successful in her career. “I still want to do the same things, but I’ve just got to do it better!”

While some participants gained career ambition, others became less focused, hoping to explore more of the world before taking on the next stage of their lives. “Now is the time for me to have fun,” Mike stated firmly. “If I have to work till I’m 75, at least I lived a full life. At least I had fun!” A decrease in career ambition was also seen in those individuals who decided to postpone their entry into the workforce. As described in the previous section, several participants opted to take time off after graduation to work and travel abroad. For instance, Laney decided to take a few years off prior to law school to do “some kind of mission work abroad or teaching English abroad for a little while.” Madison shared similar goals, though she ascribed her motivation to take time off to being “burned out” from school. “I just want to go somewhere crazy and do something crazy for a year,” she said.

**Change in work ethic.**

Forty percent of participants explicitly discussed changes in their work ethic after returning from studying abroad. Such changes were more noticeable for female participants (43%) than male participants (35%). Perceived changes in work ethic were both positive (37.5%) and negative (2.5%). From analyzing participant responses, it seemed that for most, the academic
rigor of classes abroad in essence forced participants to work harder than they had ever worked before in order to pass their classes. Through this experience, participants learned that they were capable of more academically. “It changed my whole perspective and focus about skating [through] and being immature. It actually made me work and it forces you to have a better work ethic,” Billy explained. Jane explained, “I had to try much harder than I would normally to do well. I developed more work ethic. I think it is definitely beneficial towards potential career and education.” Lauren agreed, “My work ethic is way up. I can work a lot harder than I used to!” One participant (2.5%) perceived a decline in work ethic. In terms of academic requirements, Belinda admitted that “I’m not so focused on doing every single thing. Attendance policies and busy work doesn’t really mean so much to me. I have a really poor attitude right now when it comes to school.”

**Summary.**

The fifth theme, *I am more confident in my ability to be successful*, explored participants’ perceived academic and career development during and after study abroad participation. Six major career developmental change areas were discussed, including: (a) narrowing or solidifying career choice, (b) professional skill building and career preparation, (c) confidence in the ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals, (d) choosing a career plan with an international focus, (e) change in ambition, and (f) change in work ethic.

**Summary of Themes.**

The inductive examination of interview transcripts revealed several common themes that held meaning across participants. In speaking with senior year students who had studied abroad during college about their psychosocial and career development, five main themes emerged.
Those themes included: (a) It was just great expectations! (b) Beyond the “bubble,” (c) Life is all about the people you meet; (d) I grew more than I can ever remember, and (e) I’m more confident in my ability to be successful.

To summarize, as participants relayed their study abroad accounts, they typically included experiences and perspectives that spanned predeparture through post study abroad. Participants shared their motivations for participating in foreign study, their expectations for the study abroad experience, and their perceived preparedness for living in a foreign culture. While abroad, participants seemed to share the realization that the world is much larger and more diverse than their lifestyles had led them to believe. As they adapted to the foreign culture, participants typically built diverse and meaningful friendships to support their transition. They also sustained relationships at home through the use of social networking and other technologies. Upon returning home, participants stayed in contact with their study abroad friends, adjusted prior friendships, and made efforts at building diverse relationships at home.

Living beyond the so-called “bubble” of home, participants faced many memorable and challenging experiences. These experiences allowed psychosocial growth in ways that participants had not imagined. Perceived psychosocial changes included: gains in knowledge, social and interpersonal skills, emotional flexibility, competence and self-confidence, independence and self-reliance, adaptability, self-esteem and identity, tolerance for diversity, and globalmindedness. After comparing participants’ predeparture and post study abroad career goals, several career developmental change areas were identified. These included changes in participants’ career choices, gains in professional skills, increased confidence in the ability to be mobile in pursuit of goals, changes in academic and career ambition, and changes in work ethic.
In the next chapter, the aforementioned analytic themes will be discussed in greater detail. In addition, recommendations for future practice, policy, and research will be made.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The primary purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore how study abroad participants make sense of their abroad experiences as it related specifically to psychosocial and career development. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to identify the essence of the lived experience of being a study abroad participant immersed in a foreign culture. Participants in this study were senior year students who studied abroad while attending Southeastern University – a 4-year public institution of higher learning located in the Southeastern United States. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods. The researcher conducted in-depth hour long interviews with 40 current senior year students at SU. Of this sample, 23 participants were female, and 17 were male. This chapter will offer an overview of the research and a discussion of the research findings in the context of current literature. Finally, implications of the research findings for future practice, research and policy will be discussed.

Overview of the Study.

This phenomenological qualitative research study sought to explore the psychosocial and career development of undergraduate students who participate in study abroad programs during their college careers. The study was driven by the following research question: What experiences and perspectives inform the psychosocial development [as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy
toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose] and career development (including career choice and professional identity) of students who study abroad? More specifically, the research addressed the following problems: (a) What personal and career transformation occurs (or is perceived to occur) through participation in a study abroad experience, and (b) how does participation in a study abroad program contribute to the development of career choices and life goals?

To answer these questions, data from in-depth hour long semi-structured interviews with 40 participants was collected and transcribed. After inductively analyzing the rich, thick descriptions provided by participants about their study abroad experiences, five main themes emerged. These themes were best exemplified by participant quotes, and included: (a) It was just great expectations! (b) Beyond the “bubble,” (c) Life is all about the people you meet, (d) I grew more than I can ever remember, and (e) I’m more confident in my ability to be successful. The first theme, It was just great Expectations! discussed participants’ motivations for choosing to pursue foreign study, their expectations for the study abroad experience, and their perceived preparedness for living in a foreign culture. In addition, the theme explored participants’ beliefs that every college student should study abroad. The second theme, Beyond the “bubble,” explored participants’ realization that the world is much larger and more diverse than their lifestyles had led them to believe. Also discussed, were the characteristics of the so-called “bubble” of home, as well as participants’ most memorable and challenging experiences as they lived beyond the “bubble.”

The third theme, Life is all about the people you meet, focused on the significance of relationships during and after the study abroad experience. Several aspects of study abroad
relationships were explored, including: how participants built relationships abroad, and the characteristics and meaningfulness of these relationships. The theme also discussed the process of sustaining friendships (at home and abroad), both during and after studying abroad. Finally, the theme explored participants’ efforts at building diverse relationships post study abroad.

The fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, explored the areas of perceived psychosocial change associated with the study abroad experience, as reported by participants. The ways that participants were able to make sense of their growth and development were also explored. The final theme, *I’m more confident in my ability to be successful*, explored participants’ perceived academic and career development during and after study abroad participation. Changes in participants’ career choices, professional skills, mobility, ambition, and work ethic were also discussed. These themes were presented in detail in the previous chapter.

**Discussion of research findings.**

In recent years, much research has been devoted to uncovering the personal benefits and psychosocial outcomes associated with international study. Among other outcomes, researchers have identified gains in identity development (Bates, 1997; Comp, 2000), competence (Helms & Thibadoux, 1992; McLeod & Wainwright, 2008) and autonomy (Nash, 1976; Pyle, 1981). Hansel and Grove (1986) believed that the study abroad experience fosters character, confidence, and strength that may carry over into an individual’s personal and professional life. However, exactly how these experiences inform students’ professional development remains unclear.

Despite the existing “small body of research” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) focused on the outcomes of study abroad participation (e.g. Helms & Thibadoux, 1992; Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Posey, 2003), what remains to be explored is the shared perceptions and experiences that
inform the career development of students who study abroad. Parents, as important constituents, along with accrediting bodies, are seeking to know more about how students are prepared “to work and ethically interact in an increasingly complex global community” (Rexeissen & Al-Khatib, 2009, p. 193). Therefore, exploration into the career developmental gains associated with study abroad is of increasing importance.

In light of the pervasive lack of understanding regarding how study abroad participation may foster personal and career development within an increasingly complex global community, the current study was driven by the following research question: What experiences and perspectives inform the psychosocial development [as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose] and career development (including career choice and professional identity) of students who study abroad? More specifically, the research addressed the following problems: (a) What personal and career transformation occurs (or is perceived to occur) through the participation in a study abroad experience, and (b) how does the participation in a study abroad program contribute to the development of career choices and life goals? In the section to follow, the research findings and themes of this study will be discussed as they relate to the original research question stated heretofore.

The psychosocial and career development of study abroad participants.

The researcher found that the study abroad experience did support participants’ psychosocial development along the first six vectors identified by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy
toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose. The study showed that the impact of the study abroad experience on psychosocial growth and development starts before departure and lasts well after participants’ return. In this section, Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors will be discussed as they relate to the research themes and existing literature.

**Developing Competence.**

Participants in this study experienced noteworthy gains in the area of competence while facing the many challenges outside of the “bubble” of their familiar realities. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) first vector included development in intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, social and interpersonal skills, and a general sense of competence. Most participants in this study reported noteworthy gains in at least one of these areas related to the study abroad experience. All five themes identified in this study added to the understanding of development along this vector.

First, *It was just great expectations!* demonstrated that participants’ quest for competence started prior to embarking on the study abroad experience. Participants attended orientation sessions to arm them with knowledge and expectations of the unknowns ahead. However, similar to participants in Souders’ (2009) study, participants in the current study often held unrealistic expectations and demonstrated a lack of preparedness for the cultural immersion that followed. In essence, most participants felt incompetent at the outset of their foreign sojourn, and much of their journey abroad was dedicated to gaining competence once again. Akin to the new student separating from their families as they move into the residence hall for the first time, study abroad creates an environment that in some ways retest the students’ abilities to live competently within
an unfamiliar environment. It is therefore not surprising that some of their most vivid memories shared during interviews were descriptions that focused on aspects of developing competence abroad.

The second theme, *Beyond the “bubble,”* demonstrated that the unfamiliar environment abroad brings many challenges—everything from building new friendships to navigating public transportation to adapting to the challenges of the academic classroom. Findings in the fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember,* showed that as participants overcome these challenges, they develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments which fosters confidence in the ability to be self-sufficient. These findings are consistent with that of McLoud and Wainwright (2008), who reported that study abroad participants gained a stronger internal locus of control. Gains in self-confidence could explain why two-thirds of all participants who studied abroad during their freshman or sophomore years completed at least one more study abroad program before graduating—often to a different country.

Likewise, it might also explain why these students often chose follow-up programs that would allow progressive independence. This confirms Gmelch’s (1997) findings that nervous first time travelers typically seek comfort in numbers, and as comfort is gained with unfamiliar surroundings, participants engage in greater risk-taking. However, what distinguishes the findings from Gmelch’s study is that the progressive comfort with independent travel was only clearly visible across multiple study abroad programs, and not when looking at participant behaviors within a single study abroad program.

The fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember,* also explored gains in intellectual competence, revealing that almost all participants perceived knowledge gains in at
least one of the following areas: language skill, subject-specific knowledge, or host country knowledge. As to language learning, this study confirms the findings of Comp (2000) and Waldbaum (1996) that participants seeking language immersion typically felt more competent in their ability to speak and understand a foreign language post study abroad. Growth in this area was attributed to a sink or swim situation that necessitated language learning both within and outside of the classroom, consistent with Ryan and Twibell’s (2000) findings. Participants practiced their language skills as part of the curriculum, in groups or tandem partnerships outside of class, and while navigating their daily lives within the host culture. Study abroad programs in non-English speaking countries therefore provided participants with a unique multidimensional opportunity to learn a foreign language from within the culture. This was especially true for participants who studied abroad without their American peers. They typically practiced the foreign language more consistently because they were less tempted to create a comfortable English speaking subculture while abroad.

As with language ability, gains in academic knowledge and host country knowledge also occurred both within and outside of the classroom - as Helms and Thibadoux (2000) suggested. Participants gained host-country and academic knowledge through orientation sessions at home and abroad, culture classes abroad, conversations with host country natives, and independent traveling through the region. Interestingly, though only 62.5 percent of participants explicitly listed knowledge gains as primary motivation for study abroad participation, nearly all participants (97.5%) reported gains in this area. This discrepancy is especially large for subject-specific learning, where 63 percent of participants reported gains, whereas only 7.5 percent of
participants were initially motivated by gains in this area. This seems to indicate that knowledge is gained abroad regardless of whether a specific intent for such gains existed prior to departure.

Although existing literature reporting knowledge gains for study abroad participants typically focus on language competency (e.g., Comp, 2000; Waldbau, 1996), host country knowledge (e.g. Bates, 1997; Comp, 2000) and gains in academic knowledge (e.g., Helms & Thibadoux, 1992), the current research findings exposed a previously unspecified area of knowledge gains related specifically to participants’ future careers. The fifth theme, I’m more confident in my ability to be successful, explored perceived workplace competencies and skills gained while studying abroad, including relational skills and self-directedness. Naturally, those participants completing internships were in a unique position to gain such knowledge, as they had the opportunity to gain first-hand experience in their fields of study. However, learning in this area was not limited to internship participants. Those students pursuing careers with an international focus seemed to find the study abroad experience particularly meaningful, as they were able to gain a first-hand understanding of the world that cannot be gained solely from a textbook. Interestingly, though gains in career-specific knowledge were not considered a primary motivator for study abroad participation, more than a third of participants experienced such growth.

The fifth theme, I’m more confident in my ability to be successful, also explored changes in participants’ cognitive skills. Findings revealed that nearly half of participants experienced changes in their academic and career ambition, while 40 percent perceived changes in their work ethic post study abroad. Existing literature related to changes in general cognitive skills associated with study abroad participation has typically reported conflicting results, showing
either a decline in the ability to concentrate on academic work (e.g., Comp, 2000; Carsello & Creaser, 1976) or no significant positive or negative changes in learning methods (e.g., Bates, 1997). Though the current study also yielded somewhat conflicting results among research participants, it revealed the possibility of positive change in cognitive skills associated with study abroad participation that has been previously undocumented. Most participants in this study reported increased academic and career focus, and a greater ability to apply themselves post study abroad, as evidenced by increased academic performance. Many cited the rigor and high standards of the academic classroom abroad as the catalyst for stronger work ethic and greater devotion to their academic careers. This change is especially interesting in light of the fact that most participants expected that their coursework abroad would pose few challenges given the reputation of study abroad as a “study abroad vacation,” as one participant pointed out.

The third theme, *Life is all about the people you meet*, showed that participants in this study experienced noteworthy gains in the development of social and interpersonal skills, affirming the findings of Comp (2000), Gmelch (1997), and Mahan and Stachowski (1990). Unlike participants in Gmelch’s (1997) study, contact with the host culture was typically not superficial. Most participants considered the time spent with host family members and classmates meaningful and instrumental in their growth and development, despite the presence of language barriers. Participants also built friendships with other American students abroad. Often, they traveled together in groups over weekends and breaks, learning tough lessons about teamwork and communications as they struggled to navigate their way within foreign cultural systems. Through interactions with others, nearly all participants (92.5%) became increasingly socially adept and confident in their ability to communicate and establish rapport with others.
The themes, *Beyond the “bubble,”* and *I grew more than I can ever remember,* gave limited insight into the development of physical and manual skills. As with the participants in Comp’s (2000) study, the most obvious changes in this area of competence occurred through mild, short term physical changes, such as weight fluctuations and health concerns. Only a few respondents participated in outdoor and adventure sports that specifically allowed them to build physical and manual skills. Adventures like bungee jumping, white river rafting, canyoning, shark diving, and marathon running helped students to gain a sense of pride and confidence in their ability to overcome physical challenges. Interestingly, many of these respondents had not planned to participate in these activities prior to studying abroad and considered this behavior uncharacteristic of their predeparture selves. It seemed that the excitement of living in a foreign country often encouraged participants to live life to the fullest, which in turn promotes physical risk-taking.

The study abroad experience seemingly supports unique personal competencies that students would not necessarily have acquired within the university setting. Though knowledge is also gained in the SU classroom, participants felt strongly about the fact that living the learning abroad brings concepts to life in new ways that cannot be gained from a textbook. In addition, students who remain on campus are often so comfortable in their surroundings that they are in essence under-challenged. Those students who break out of the familiar during college seem better prepared and more confident in their ability to face other unfamiliar surroundings.

**Managing Emotions.**

The findings of this study show that study abroad is associated with development along Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) second vector, *Managing Emotions.* Most of the existing
literature applied to this vector has focused on culture shock (e.g., Gibson, 1991) and somewhat vague descriptions of emotional well-being (e.g., Carsello & Creaser, 1976; Kauffman & Kuh, 1984). Findings discussed under the fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, revealed a need to expand thinking beyond these aspects to gains in participants’ ability to manage their emotions flexibly as they navigate challenges within the unfamiliar environment abroad. In addition, existing literature has not fully identified the specific experiences that support the development of emotional competence during foreign study. The findings of this study has suggested that opportunities for growth in this area of development extends beyond just the study abroad experience, and also includes predeparture and post study abroad experiences.

Akin to the new student leaving the comforts of home to enter the unknown college environment, participants faced anxiety and sadness as they separated from their family and friends in order to study abroad. For some, these negative feelings were overshadowed by excitement and eager anticipation of the unknown. For others, anxiety and sadness was all encompassing for days leading up to departure, and remained during the first few days abroad. As participants adapted to their temporary homes abroad, they had to become aware of their emotions, and then find ways to manage such emotions flexibly – as Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested. To this end, participants turned to journaling or blogging, new or existing friendships at home and abroad, or distracting activities such as traveling, partying, and participating in risky adventure sports.

Homesickness was but one of the challenges participants faced beyond the “bubble.” Participants had to learn to manage the frustrations of language barriers, unfamiliar academic
systems, and independent travel. The first theme, *It was just great Expectations!* revealed how students sometimes had to overcome disappointment as their expectations of the study abroad experience were not met. In addition, findings described in the themes, *Beyond the “bubble,”* and *I grew more than I can ever remember,* revealed that as participants experienced unfamiliar lifestyles and ideals firsthand, some degree of internal conflict arose with regards to their own beliefs and values about acceptable living. These findings therefore affirm the possibility of culture shock during the study abroad experience, as Gibson (1991) suggested.

Interestingly, many participants did not experience culture shock strongly upon entering the host culture, but instead rather upon returning to their home cultures. It seems that as participants adapted to the socio-cultural systems abroad and became more accepting of diverse lifestyles, they internalized some of the ideals of the host culture. In addition, for some this was indeed the first time they had come to realize that their predeparture lifestyles and realities were far removed from that of the rest of the world (i.e., the “bubble” effect). Often then, when participants returned to the largely unchanged “bubble,” they no longer felt a natural fit given the many ways they had changed during the experience. This reverse culture shock created another opportunity for participants to become aware of their emotions and to learn how to manage them flexibly.

While abroad, participants face unique challenges that conjure emotions outside of the typical emotional experiences of college students. Besides grieving the loss of a loved one, sadness about loss of support networks would typically not be felt until after graduation as students move away from college to start their careers or graduate school. Study abroad participants have the unique opportunity to learn to manage these emotions before their stay at
home peers typically will. More importantly, they are armed with unique personal experiences and self-understanding that will support success during the post-graduation transition.

**Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence.**

The findings of this study supported gains in all three of the components of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) third vector, including: emotional independence, instrumental independence, and interdependence. First, contrary to studies by Lathrop (1999) and Pyle (1981), findings supported noteworthy gains in several areas of emotional independence. Existing literature in the field has typically focused on emotional independence as a larger concept without examining the various dimensions to this vector described by Chickering and Reisser. The current study has expanded understanding of the emotional independence of study abroad participants by identifying specific growth areas, including: (a) confidence in the ability to be self-sufficient; (b) relying more heavily on peer relationships; (c) freedom from continual need for reassurance, affection and approval; and (d) balance of comfort with one’s own company and openness to others. Findings from the themes, *Life is all about the people you meet*, and *I grew more than I can ever remember*, most informed development along this vector.

It is not surprising that participants gain confidence in their ability to be self-sufficient as they successfully overcome the many challenges beyond the “bubble.” While abroad, they learn to make day-to-day decisions without having to rely upon parents for emotional support and guidance. Findings of the third theme, *Life is all about the people you meet*, suggest that participants typically turn to new and existing peer relationships abroad as they faced the day-to-day challenges of adjusting to the host culture, learning the foreign language, overcoming feelings of homesickness, and navigating their way through foreign countries. This confirms
Gmelch’s (1997) findings about the growing importance of peer relationships in the study abroad setting.

Unlike the participants in Gmelch’s (1997) study, however, participants in this study moved beyond the need to cling to each other in search of comfort towards a balance of comfort with self and others. As described in the theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, for some, time spent alone was initially overwhelming and anxiety provoking. However, participants eventually grew more comfortable with their own company - often for the first time. A few participants used this time for reflection and self-discovery. Rather remarkably, these experiences supported the development of a stronger sense of self, leaving participants less in need of continual reassurance, affection and approval from others – another important element of this vector.

The second component of this vector, as identified by Chickering and Reisser (1993) is developing instrumental independence. Findings outlined in the fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, affirmed that participation in a study abroad experience builds instrumental independence in at least two ways: (a) the student becomes increasingly confident in his or her ability to be mobile in pursuit of educational opportunities, and (b) the student becomes adept at acting in self-sufficient ways. At least 80 percent of participants in this study experienced gains in one of the two aforementioned areas. These findings are contrary to that of Pyle (1981), who reported no significant gains in the instrumental independence of study abroad participants.

As to gains in mobility, the study abroad experience by definition is an opportunity that requires a student to be mobile in pursuit of opportunity or adventure abroad. Interestingly, it seems that once a student successfully completes such an experience, they feel encouraged to
pursue additional opportunities that would require mobility. Ninety percent of participants in this study expressed greater confidence in their ability to move to another city or country after graduation in order to pursue academic and career opportunities. Remarkably, many of these students had expected to remain in the South or close to family prior to studying abroad. It seems that once participants had proved to themselves that they can overcome the challenges of unfamiliar environments, they felt confident that they could adapt again, no matter where they were to find themselves in the future. This affirms the findings of McLoud and Wainwright (2008), who believed that participants experience changes in self-perceptions as they overcome stressful situations abroad, supporting a stronger internal locus of control.

The study abroad experience therefore supports the development of students’ independence in unique ways. Students who remain at SU might be less inclined to separate from parents and act autonomously because families are typically within easy reach via telephone or in person to offer comfort or solve problems when difficult situations arise. In contrast, students abroad often found it difficult or near impossible to contact parents in their time of need because they typically did not carry cellular telephones and time differences caused a challenge.

Findings of the fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember* suggested that in the absence of familiar comforts and support systems of home, participants were forced to adapt to their new environments and to act in self-reliant ways. This included learning how to navigate public transportation systems, how to buy groceries or personal items in non-English speaking countries, and how to succeed in the foreign classroom - to name just a few. As participants overcome the many external and personal obstacles abroad, they felt proud of their accomplishments and more confident in their ability to solve problems and to handle complex or
unanticipated situations. These findings affirm Gmelch’s (1997) belief that participants become progressively more self-reliant and increasingly confident while studying abroad.

Also described in the fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, is participants’ growing awareness of their place within the world community. For some, it was the first time that they had fully understood the interconnectedness of countries within the global community, and especially the impact of America’s choices on the rest of the world. Many participants returned home eager to be better global citizens and to be more informed about the world around them. This affirms Hutchins’ (1996) findings that study abroad participants gained a sense of connectedness to a global community.

As participants became more aware of the global community, they were often also inspired to contribute more to the welfare of the larger community. These findings contradict Lathrop’s (1999) study that showed no significant gains in interdependence of undergraduate students who study abroad. The theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember* revealed that participants who traveled to poverty-stricken regions often experience a growing empathy for people who were less fortunate than themselves. These students in particular were moved to find ways to help others, albeit locally or on an international level. Several piloted or became involved in local service projects, while others made plans to devote a few years after graduation to helping others through service in the Peace Corps or Teach for America. In addition, after living in cultures that purposefully conserve energy and resources, several participants became more serious about green living and conservation. Growth in this area of development therefore supports citizenship, which will be especially valuable for the student as they ready themselves to be a part of the larger community outside of academe post graduation.
Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.

Relationships were a central part of participants’ study abroad experiences. In fact, over a third of participants considered the relationships they built abroad to be the biggest benefit of study abroad participation. However, these relationships did not come without challenges. Participants had to learn to engage with others who were often very different from themselves. They had to overcome personal biases and move towards a greater open-mindedness of others’ beliefs and lifestyles. The findings of this study therefore support growth and development in Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) fourth vector, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.

Two themes provide most insight into development along this vector. First, Life is all about the people you meet, best described the many changes in relationships that participants’ experienced during and after the study abroad experience. Second, I grew more than I can ever remember, specifically described gains in participants’ tolerance for diversity.

Most existing literature relevant to this vector has focused on changes in study abroad participants’ tolerance for diversity (e.g., Helms & Thibadoux, 1992; Zhai, 2000). This is not surprising, as by its very nature, the study abroad experience creates the opportunity to interact with diverse people. The findings of this study revealed that to find comfort in the foreign environment, participants often forged friendships with fellow students from SU, other American students, fellow international students, and students from the host culture. The fourth theme, I grew more than I can ever remember, showed that as students connect with peers and engage with individuals in the local community, they become more comfortable and open to other lifestyles and belief systems. This study confirmed previous findings by Helms and Thibadoux (1992) and Zhai (2000). Wortman (2002) suggested that study abroad participants typically
exhibit high levels of openness to diversity prior to departure. However, participants’
descriptions of their predeparture selves in *Beyond the “bubble”* disconfirmed this suggestion, as
many reported being closed-minded and rigid in their thinking prior to their experiences abroad.
This self-assessment remains relative, though, as it is possible that these participants were more
open to diversity than their peers prior to studying abroad, even though they did not acknowledge
this difference explicitly.

In addition, Wortman’s (2002) findings suggested that students pursuing opportunities in
non-English speaking cultures showed no significant changes in openness to diversity. These
findings were disconfirmed in the current study. The theme, *Life is all about the people you
meet*, revealed that most participants in both non-English speaking and English speaking
countries showed an increased tolerance for diversity. Furthermore, many were able to move
beyond mere awareness of cultural differences to an understanding and appreciation thereof, as
Wallace (1999) suggested. Participants’ newfound appreciation of diversity and their firsthand
experiences of being ‘other’ in a foreign culture supported greater cultural sensitivity. This
phenomenon was also explored by Gillin and Young (2009).

Participants in this study found a common bond with peers who were different and
similar to them. It seems that the shared experience of facing the many uncertainties and
challenges of living in an unknown environment without known support systems (a.k.a., being
“in the same boat”) fostered an environment marked by immediate acceptance and support. The
result was that deep, uninhibited friendships emerged. Friends spent much time cooking, eating,
and conversing together while learning about the other’s culture. Through these exchanges,
participants came to understand that relationships are able to transcend cultural and language barriers.

Though most participants formed meaningful relationships with diverse peers, a few participants found themselves more naturally drawn to other American students. Faculty-led SU study abroad programs typically consisted solely of SU students, and therefore lacked the presence of diverse peers. Students were in essence sheltered from the host culture because their large numbers enabled them to create a “tiny America” (as Rachel described it) characterized by English language and a pervasive American culture. This phenomenon also occurred in programs with large numbers of American students from other institutions. Several participants thought that gravitating towards other American students was an easy and natural thing to do. American peers seemingly found a familiar comfort with one other in the midst of unknown surroundings. The result was that these students typically had superficial contact with their international peers, confirming the findings of Gmelch (1997). One participant in this study went as far as to say that her American group of friends were so “obsessed” with learning about one another and spending time together that she knew very little of her surroundings or the host culture.

Post study abroad, most participants stayed in regular contact with their newfound study abroad friends. These relationships are a perfect example of those described by Chickering and Reisser (1993) as brief in duration, powerful, and leading to “enduring warmth.” However, not all participants were able to form relationships that were meaningful. The theme, Beyond the “bubble,” revealed that participants considered meeting new people and building friendships to be the third biggest challenge faced abroad. Often, participants who had not formed meaningful
friendships returned home with a greater appreciation for their family and friends, and an increased willingness to devote time and energy towards sustaining these relationships.

For most participants, study abroad relationships had a profound impact on the way they viewed themselves and the world around them. Participants were able to build relationships outside of their usual social roles and identities, creating an environment of self-discovery and eventual self-acceptance. “We all think that we need solitude to change us,” Mike stated. “But it’s the people around you that change you more than anything. It’s stuff you have to realize about others to realize stuff about yourself, too.” This phenomenon supports Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) belief in “the importance of students’ experiences with relationships in the formation of a cores sense of self,” (p.39) and therefore also the sequencing the vector, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, before Establishing Identity.

While abroad, participants often stayed in contact with their existing friends through social-networking sites like Facebook and video conferencing software like Skype. This study confirmed the findings of Mikal (2010) suggesting that students often use technology to maintain friendships and to seek socio-emotional support during the study abroad experience. Though several participants were afraid that their extended absence would alter existing friendships, many were glad to learn that it is possible for meaningful relationships to persist despite a long separation. Chickering and Reisser (1993) called this the realization that “stability and loyalty endure through crisis, distance, and separation” (p.147).

For others, geographic separation sparked the re-evaluation of existing friendships in order to discern which friends are steadfast and which are fair-weather. For some, returning from study abroad was an eye-opening experience that caused them to break ties with previous
friends. Chickering and Reisser (1993) referred to this phenomenon as “moving from intimacy to separation” (p. 145), an important component of mature relationships. Participants felt changed in many ways, and sometimes there was no longer a good fit with old friends. Several female participants chose to drop out of their sororities after studying abroad because they simply did not relate to sorority life in the same way.

In addition, stay at home friends were often unwilling to hear about participants’ study abroad adventures and were unable to understand the significance of the experience. In response, participants often tried to remind themselves that their peers have remained unchanged because they did not have the same opportunity to broaden their horizons. For some, however, this realization was not enough. They chose to seek comfort with friends who were more supportive – often fellow study abroad participants, newfound study abroad friends, and foreign study students on the SU campus. Chickering and Reisser (1993) called this “moving from distance to closeness” (p. 145) in search of healthier relationships.

It becomes clear that for participants, the study abroad experience involved many unexpected relationship changes, which shaped their development along Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) fourth vector, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships. The findings of this study therefore disconfirms the notion that no significant changes in students’ capacities for mature interpersonal relationships exist post study abroad, as Herman (1996) and Pyle (1981) suggested. Instead, this study affirms James’ (1976) findings that there is an improvement in students’ ability to relate with others in mature ways. Development in this area will be particularly useful for students as they move into the next phase of their lives, which will likely require them to seek and build new relationships with people from diverse backgrounds. Within
today’s global society, a multicultural perspective will support future success in the workplace and beyond (Gardner, Steglitz, & Gross, 2009).

**Establishing Identity.**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) opined that in order to establish identity, the student must first successfully have developed along all of the preceding vectors. Given that strong evidence exists to indicate participants’ growth in preceding vectors, it is not surprising that one of the biggest areas of psychosocial development in this study occurred along the fifth vector, *Establishing Identity*. Most existing literature relevant to this vector has focused on gains in self-confidence (e.g., Comp, 2000; Gmelch, 1997; McLoud & Wainwright, 2008), self-esteem (e.g., Comp, 2000; Juhasz & Walker, 1987) and self-efficacy (Bates, 1997; Milstein, 2005) of study abroad participants. Findings of the current study confirmed developmental gains in all of the aforementioned interrelated areas, thereby negating the decline in self-confidence identified in Nash’s (1976) study. The fourth theme, *I grew more than I can ever remember*, best described findings applicable to development along this vector.

Three quarters of participants in this study believed that the study abroad experience strengthened their sense of self, self-esteem and self-acceptance. While abroad, participants were able to in essence recreate their identities in the absence of familiar socio-cultural roles and expectations. This freedom often helped participants to discover parts of themselves that they did not know existed, or to rediscover forgotten interests and passions. As participants explored different versions of themselves, accepting peers helped to also instill a sense of self-acceptance, strengthening participants’ sense of self. At the same time participants also had to overcome the many internal and external challenges of day to day life. When they were able to overcome these
successfully, they became proud of their accomplishment and increasingly confident in their abilities to be self-sufficient problem-solvers. The result is that students felt good about themselves, feeling as though they can overcome any obstacle that life sends their way in the future.

As participants learned about other cultures, they often also reflected upon their place within their own culture and their socio-cultural identity. For several participants, this experience was particularly meaningful in that it helped them to overcome long-standing inner conflicts related to their family upbringing and socio-economic background. “Without even realizing I was doing it, I was reevaluating who I was in this community, who I was in my family, what type of friend I was, and what type of friend I wanted to be,” Laney explained. Chickering and Reisser (1993) believed that developing a solid sense of self is a critical step in the psychosocial development of undergraduate students. The findings of this study, particularly those discussed in *I grew more than I can ever remember*, revealed the central role of study abroad participation in the development of a sense of self, self-confidence, and self-acceptance.

Though the findings of this study showed positive gains in many of the areas of identity development outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), the current study did, however, fail to provide insight into students’ comfort with their bodies and appearance and their comfort with their own gender and sexual orientation while studying abroad. This is not surprising, given that very little research currently exists that addresses these issues (e.g., Comp, 2000). It seems that these are not topics that participants address voluntarily without interview questions that are designed specifically towards this goal.
Developing Purpose.

Findings of the fifth theme, *I’m more confident in my ability to be successful*, affirmed that study abroad participants do experience growth in Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) sixth vector, *Developing Purpose*. However, findings suggest that development along this vector is multidimensional and complex, and does not always result in clear career goals and choices post study abroad. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), progress in the first five vectors enables the student to answer, “Who am I?” while they continue to discover the unique characteristics, talents, competencies, behaviors and roles that define them for future vocation and avocation. In essence, development along the first five vectors culminates in the students’ development of purpose. By this reasoning, all of the psychosocial growth areas discussed heretofore remain relevant in the discussion of study abroad participants’ career development.

The relevance of preceding vectors for career development.

At the time of interview, participants in this study were nearing the last semester of their senior year of college. They seemed very aware of the post-graduation realities that were looming around the corner. For most participants, graduation would necessitate moving away from the college town they had called home for the past four to five years. Given the challenges of the current economy, participants were aware that they might be forced to move across country to unfamiliar cities in pursuit of career enhancing opportunities. Whether they chose to start their careers or enter graduate school, wherever they found themselves, participants would have to make their own way in an environment that is essentially foreign to them.

This scenario does not seem unlike the experience of studying abroad in a foreign country. In essence, through study abroad participation, students have had a practice round of
similar experiences that has prepared them for living “outside the bubble in the real world,” as one participant called it. Foreign study opportunities support students’ separation from their parents, in essence preparing them to go into the world as independent persons. As students approach this transition, a sense of competence in their ability to acquire new skills, internalize information, and communicate with diverse peers will support their future success in the workplace and beyond. The many unique internal and external challenges that participants face abroad help build independence, self-confidence, and adaptability – skills that are extremely valuable in the workplace. Self-reliance and the freedom from a continual need for approval will further support success in the workplace.

The many positive and negative experiences abroad elicit a large range of emotions, like sadness over loss of friendships and support networks. Out of necessity, participants find ways to manage these emotions. Now, when participants enter the workplace, they may be less overwhelmed by feelings of uncertainty or incompetence, as they’ve already overcome such emotions in a challenging context. Participants will likely find themselves better prepared to face the stresses of “the real world” because they know that although everything might seem lost, they will find their way through it. Foreign study experiences allow students to reflect positively upon their accomplishments and to stand confident in their ability to be successful beyond graduation.

Having successfully faced the challenges of entering a completely foreign social environment as an outsider, participants may be less afraid to actively engage with others in the workplace. They would also be more adept at building relationships with diverse colleagues and clientele in light of the multicultural competence gained abroad. Most importantly, participants
possess greater cultural sensitivity after their study abroad experiences - a highly marketable skill in today’s diverse society.

The study abroad experience allows students to gain a stronger sense of self and a better understanding of their interests, beliefs, competencies and roles. It is not beyond reason to believe that before students may know what they want to become, they must first know who they are. Super (1972) believed that identity and self-esteem becomes the driving force behind career exploration and decision-making. Study abroad participants’ developed self-concept may be instrumental in the process of establishing mature and meaningful career goals, as Gottfredson (1981) suggested. The findings therefore indicate that the study abroad experience serves a maturing function, ultimately separating participants from “the herd” as they strive to develop purpose in anticipation of the next phase of their lives.

**Study abroad and career decision-making.**

The findings of this study affirmed the relevance of the career theories of Ginzberg et al (1951) and Super (1972) for study abroad participants. The findings described in the fifth theme, *I’m more confident in my ability to be successful*, indicated that while abroad, participants were either: (a) exploring different vocational options, (b) committing to a particular vocation, or (c) taking steps to prepare for a chosen career. These activities will frame the discussion about study abroad participants’ movement along Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) sixth vector, *Developing Purpose*.

**Exploring vocational options.**

The theme, *I’m more confident in my ability to be successful*, described findings related to participants’ career exploration, in particular the processes of discovering new career interests.
and narrowing career choices. Among participants, sixty-five percent believed that they had
discovered new career interests and broadened their career options during the study abroad
experience – thereby affirming the findings of Pyle (1981). For many participants in this study,
career interests were sparked unexpectedly, either through the curriculum, during planned and
spontaneous activities, or in conversation with others. These findings support Chickering and
Reisser’s (1993) belief that vocational interests may be discovered in unanticipated ways. Nearly
sixty percent of participants reported narrowing their career choices after studying abroad.
Growth in this area of career development was happenstance for some, while it was a
predetermined goal of study abroad participation for others.

For several participants, the study abroad experience was the catalyst that inspired
reflection about career and life goals. Though career solidification did in some cases not happen
for some time after the experience, the study abroad participation seemed to at least instill a
desire to explore career options. Lathrop’s (1999) study revealed similar increases in career
planning and exploration post study abroad. It seems that as participants’ identities became
solidified, they were inspired to identify careers that were more congruent to their expanded
interests, values, and beliefs. A few participants moved from solidified career choices to the
exploration of career options when they realized that their initial choice was not a good fit for
them. This can likely also be attributed to a strengthened self-concept emerging during the study
abroad experience.

Interestingly, for some participants, study abroad participation prolonged the exploration
of vocational options. More than half of participants in this study expressed a desire to postpone
their entry into the working world or graduate school in exchange for service in the Peace Corps,
Teach for America, or odd jobs abroad. Even typically high-achieving and goal-directed participants found themselves desiring a detour before committing to the next step in their vocational plans. It seems that while abroad, participants gain clarity about the things they value most in life. For these participants, traveling, adventure, and general happiness took precedence over career security and financial gains.

*Committing to a particular vocation.*

Classroom curricula and internship experiences abroad helped to reinforce many participants’ predeparture career choices. This was especially the case for participants pursuing international career paths. The result was that several participants solidified their career choices during or shortly following the foreign study experience. Participants in studies by Norris and Gillespie (2008) and Wallace (1999) also clarified their career interests. The researcher in this study expected to discover gains in professional identity as participants solidified their career choices. However, the findings of this study failed to support any such gains. Remarkably, none of the 40 participants in this study discussed growth in this area.

Ibarra (1999) discussed professional identity development in terms of the individual’s definition of self in a professional role. This finding could therefore reflect the reality that at the time of interview, participants in this study were nearing college completion and had not yet entered a professional role. However, by this definition, it remains surprising that those participants who completed internships in a professional setting abroad did not articulate growth in this area more clearly. This might in part be due to the fact that none of the interview questions directly elicited a discussion about professional identity development. Participants
might also have perceived developmental gains in this area less noteworthy when compared to
growth in other areas of psychosocial and career development.

Despite a lack of articulation in regards to professional identity development associated
with study abroad participation, the findings of this study did support growth in the self-concept
of study abroad participants. As a stable sense of self is central to the individual’s professional
identity (Ibarra, 1999), psychosocial development associated with study abroad participation may
form the foundation for future professional identity development within the workforce.

Faced with the prospect of exciting new career options post studying abroad, more than
20 percent of participants in this study chose to adjust their academic plans by changing or
adding a major or minor academic focus. These findings affirm Pyle’s (1981) belief that
participants’ newly developed skills and aptitudes may lead to the reassessment and redefinition
of career goals and interests. Participants in Gibson’s (1991) study also changed their career
choices, both in fields and emphases. However, unlike participants in Gibson’s study, none of the
current study’s participants changed their degree focus to English as a Second Language (ESL)
instruction. For most participants in this study, degree changes often necessitated a delay in
graduation. However gains in work ethic seemed to compensate for lost time. At the time of
interview, one hundred percent of participants were anticipating graduation in the current
academic year. Findings in this study affirm Posey’s (2003) findings of high levels of agree
attainment among study abroad participants.

Interestingly, post study abroad, eighty percent of participants in this study chose to
pursue career goals with an international focus. Helms and Thibadoux (1992) and Zhai (2000)
found similar interest in pursuing international careers post study abroad among participants in
their studies. At the time of interview, several participants in this study were considering graduate study or post-graduate internships at foreign institutions. Many were not aware of these career options prior to studying abroad. Other participants committed themselves to careers that would allow short term foreign exchanges or long term expatriate positions abroad.

With growing commitment to future vocations, participants recognized that the realities of the current economy would likely require them to be mobile in pursuit of career-enhancing opportunities. Interestingly, ninety percent of participants in this study felt as if study abroad participation had given them confidence in their ability to be mobile in pursuit of future career and life goals. Most participants were committed to moving wherever their careers would lead them – across country or even across the world.

*Taking steps to prepare for a chosen career.*

Chickering and Reisser (1993) believed that the student must not only craft a vision of the desired outcomes for his or her life, but also create a plan to reach such goals. As participants in this study became more certain of their chosen career paths, they began to consider the steps necessary to attain their goals. Several participants decided to attend graduate school in the United States or abroad in order to further their education. Armed with clear career goals, these participants expressed feelings of readiness to move to the next phase of their lives.

Though not all participants were prepared to commit to a future career and to set a specific career plan in action, ninety percent of participants felt as if their experiences armed them with career-specific skills that have prepared them for their future careers. These skills included interpersonal skills, multicultural competence, and globalmindedness. The study affirms gains in foreign language skills, as suggested by Norris and Gillespie (2008) and Wallace (1999).
However, unlike participants in the aforementioned studies, participants in the current study have not yet entered the work force, and have therefore not had the opportunity to apply and test the usefulness of these skill-sets.

As participants successfully overcame day to day challenges of cultural immersion in self-reliant ways, they built confidence in their ability to achieve their goals and to be successful. Many felt as if they would be able to face a wide range of workplace challenges post study abroad. In addition, participants believed that foreign study armed them with real-world experiences valuable for future job interviews and business conversations. Many stressed that study abroad participation will boost their resumes and give them a competitive edge as job applicants.

Interestingly, descriptions related to study abroad and career preparation were very vague. Participants seemed to struggle to articulate the exact benefit of study abroad for their future careers. Much of the findings explored in *I’m more confident in my ability to be successful* were not in direct response to career-specific questions, as these were often immediately answered, “I don’t know!” Often only as participants discussed their experiences, did they seem to gain clarity about the relevance of these experiences for their career and personal development. These findings affirm Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) belief that students may remain unable to provide clear and realistic definitions about career choices and goals during the collegiate years.

*Summary.*

The findings of this study revealed that study abroad participants do show noteworthy growth along Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) sixth vector, *Developing Purpose*. These findings
are especially timely, given that important constituents like parents and accrediting bodies are increasingly seeking evidence of the career-specific outcomes of the college experience and relevant programs. Colleges often offer a cornucopia of programs to support students’ psychosocial growth and development, some of which are specifically aimed at career development. It is therefore worth asking how the benefits associated with study abroad participation are any different than the benefits associated with taking a career development course, for instance. Though the latter course might pose a much smaller financial burden on students and their families, it takes place within the confines of a familiar environment. Students who study abroad, on the other hand, are in essence thrown into sink or swim situations far removed from their familiar realities.

Findings of this study suggest that the study abroad experience supports growth in every area of psychosocial development that is critical to the development of purpose. A career course, on the other hand, would perhaps simply help students gain intellectual competence as they reflect upon information about career choice and development. Rather than just internalizing information, study abroad participants are in essence living their learning. They are incorporating first-hand experiences into a stronger sense of self, which in turn supports their exploration of career interests and goals. Although study abroad participation may not be the most cost effective option if scholarships and financial aid are not available, it does in many ways offer a tremendous ‘bang for the buck.’ Study abroad participants in this study are armed with practical and marketable skill-sets, self-knowledge and confidence. They feel ready for whatever their futures may bring. Perhaps those outcomes are indeed invaluable.
Implications for Higher Education practice.

At a time when the globalization of Higher Education is receiving much attention in academic and lay circles, the findings of this study are especially relevant. Most importantly, the findings of this study have revealed several critical implications for Higher Education administrators. This section offers a discussion of recommendations for future practice of Study Abroad administrators, Career Services professionals, Campus Mental Health Professionals and Allied Professional Counselors, and administrators.

Implications for Study Abroad Administrators.

Focusing on cultural preparation.

Among participants in this study, the majority felt under-prepared for the cultural immersion associated with living in a foreign country. Though mandatory orientation programs are often in place to prepare students before departure, it seems these programs are specifically focused on the logistics of living in a foreign country. Several participants believed that it would have been very beneficial to know more about the customs and traditions of the host culture prior to departure – especially as these relate to acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors on the part of the student. It is therefore suggested that Study Abroad administrators take time during already existing orientation sessions to better prepare students to be a part of the foreign culture.

Where possible, study abroad orientation sessions could be scheduled in a workshop format, where administrators introduce students to the culture by inviting guest speakers who are natives of the country. Where such individuals are not readily accessible, students might find film clips or music selections from the culture equally engaging. Whatever the method, care should be taken to move students toward cultural understanding beyond merely “a thought in our
heads,” as one student referred to it. Students should leave the orientation session armed with at least a preliminary understanding of the host culture in order to support a smoother adjustment. This should include information regarding expectations for the foreign classroom and grading systems, as students felt especially underprepared to face challenges in these areas.

Another important part of the cultural preparation process is making students aware of the possibility that their American identity might be challenged while they travel abroad. Many participants had heard that Americans have a negative reputation in other parts of the world, though they did not fully expect the extent to which they would be stereotyped. Participants were unprepared for the opposition and many accusing questions they would face while abroad. It is therefore important that Study Abroad administrators make participants aware of the view that others hold of Americans, and more specifically, American exchange students. They should also be advised how to handle difficult situations or how to answer questions in ways that would minimize further conflict. Though facing challenges seem to be an important part of the growth process, arming students with the tools necessary to overcome such challenges will support their adjustment so that learning in other areas may follow.

**Implementing meaningful experiences across study abroad programs.**

Participants in this study discussed the experiences and perspectives that informed their personal and career development while studying abroad. Though many of these were unanticipated challenges within the foreign environment, a few meaningful elements emerged that could be implemented across study abroad programs. The insight they provided partly answers the question posed by Gillespie (2002, July 5): “Are there any core experiences that every student in a study-abroad program should share?” First, it is critical that participants take
part in activities abroad that allow them to engage with persons from other ethnicities and nationalities. It seems that when students travel in large groups with American peers, they tend to isolate themselves from others, limiting their learning opportunities. In addition, many programs are faculty-led by the home institution, which creates a homogenous learning environment. Marmolejo (2011, March 2) explained that international educators often avoid speaking about the true impact of the “bubble effect” of such programs on students’ cultural immersion.

To counter this tendency to create a “tiny America” abroad, participants should be encouraged to join at least one club within the campus or larger community abroad (Spencer & Tuma, 2002). Participants in this study who joined sport or art clubs, or formed tandem language partnerships with native speakers, seemed to build meaningful relationships during these activities, further supporting their psychosocial growth and development. In addition, study abroad advisors should encourage students to attend the social events hosted at partner institutions, as this is a great opportunity to meet other international students and students from the host culture. Care should also be taken to make housing arrangements that include common living areas in order to maximize opportunities to engage with diverse others. Participants in this study particularly enjoyed the conversations and learning occurred while cooking dinner in communal kitchens.

Second, it is advised that students partake in service opportunities abroad that will allow them to engage with members of the larger community, especially in poverty-stricken regions. The findings of this study suggest that students gain a greater commitment to the welfare of others as they are exposed to the realities of life in other parts of the world. It is therefore important that students be presented with a clear opportunity to focus their newfound willingness
to help. Service opportunities may include teaching in local classrooms, spending time with children in local orphanages, or feeding the homeless. Of course, the safety of the student should take precedence and may determine the service opportunities available. Such opportunities will further support students’ growing citizenship to the world and their local communities at home.

Third, it is recommended that all students enroll in a culture class abroad that has a curriculum designed to support students’ understanding of the things they are observing while living within the culture. Participants in this study who were enrolled in such classes showed a greater appreciation for the host culture and adapted to the culture much easier than their peers. Study Abroad administrators therefore should help students to identify these classes at the host institution, and encourage them to enroll. If such courses are readily available at partner institutions, Study Abroad administrators should consider making culture classes a required part of the study abroad curriculum to best support student growth and development. If these classes are not available in the formal curriculum of the host institution, Study Abroad administrators might craft agreements among partner institutions that would ensure programming designed to reach similar goals.

**Creating opportunity for reflection.**

Findings of this study revealed that although participants grew considerably in their personal development while studying abroad, they often lacked true understanding of the meaning of this growth. A lack of interest and support from peers and family members after the study abroad experience left participants without an immediate outlet to reflect and make sense of their experiences. The result was that many participants were unable to clearly articulate the
meaningfulness of their study abroad experiences in terms of their personal and career development.

Some have contested the value of study abroad as “little more than an extracurricular activity” (Posey, 2003, p. 5). Although it is possible that this study has revealed the true value of study abroad participation, students’ inability to clearly articulate this value impedes movement away from the negative stigma associated with study abroad programs. If study abroad participants’ understanding of their development and learning could be more clearly articulated, it could better the case for the support of study abroad programs. Furthermore, greater understanding of the meaningfulness of their experiences may better maximize the learning potential associated with study abroad participation.

Consequently, Study Abroad administrators should take a more active position in the facilitation of students’ understanding of the significance of their experiences (Spencer & Tuma, 2002). One way to achieve this goal is to incorporate a reflective component into the study abroad curriculum. Findings of this study suggest that participants are so over-stimulated abroad that they may not always take the time to be quiet and reflect upon the meaningfulness of their experiences. Therefore, requiring at least a minimal level of reflection during the process would be beneficial. Participants could be asked to write a reflective essay about their motivations for choosing foreign study and their expectations of the experience as part of the study abroad application process. This would help them to become more aware of their expectations, and also give Study Abroad administrators an opportunity to help students to rethink potentially unrealistic expectations.
After departure, participants could be required to submit at least one reflective journal entry per month to their study abroad or academic advisors. Given the increase in workload involved for administrators, it should be noted that whether the appointed advisor reads these reflections is not as relevant as the fact that the student would have taken the necessary time to think carefully about the many ways that they are changing within the foreign environment. It is suggested that a list of thought-provoking questions be made available to students to guide their journal entries, as some students may not be naturally self-reflective.

Another way to support students’ self-reflection is to offer opportunities for debriefing upon their return. It is suggested that Study Abroad administrators schedule mandatory re-entry interviews immediately following the study abroad experience focused on furthering participants’ self-reflection and understanding. Knowing that administrators in this field may not be trained to effectively facilitate students’ self-reflection, they may be more comfortable enlisting the services of the Campus Counseling Center to conduct reflective interviews with students upon their return to campus. Alternatively, the Campus Counseling Center may assist by simply tailoring a list of well-crafted interview questions and probes to serve as a guideline for such conversations. Regardless of the specific set-up, most importantly, participants should simply be provided with an engaging and welcoming space to at least start the self-reflective process.

**Harnessing study abroad participants’ enthusiasm.**

The findings of this study suggest that study abroad participants return to their home institutions full of excitement and fervor. They are eager to inspire others with their stories and new perspectives. Participants in this study believed that all students should have the opportunity
to study abroad. Why not give them the opportunity to share this belief with others on campus? Given that these students in essence have the potential to be dynamic change-makers on campus, administrators should attempt to harness their enthusiasm and direct it towards opportunities to inspire study abroad participation and to broaden the perspectives of those who remained at home. Several institutions have done so by creating “study abroad ambassador” programs that pair up currently enrolled study abroad alumni with prospective participants (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Furthering this initiative, it is suggested that Study Abroad administrators arrange for study abroad alumni to visit classrooms and campus organizations to share their experiences. The benefit would be twofold: participants would have a much-needed opportunity to share their experiences with a willing audience, stimulating personal reflection, and other students on campus may become inspired to pursue similar opportunities. Study abroad participants may also serve the Study Abroad office well by working as student workers. As fellow students contact the office to inquire about study abroad opportunities, former participants would serve as peer mentors who instill excitement and offer advice to potential participants.

In addition, participants in this study were typically very eager to help international students at their home institution upon returning from the study abroad experience. Their experiences of being ‘other’ in a foreign culture gave them insight into the challenges that international students face on American campuses, and instilled in them a desire to make others feel welcome in their culture. It is recommended that Study Abroad administrators create purposeful partnerships between prior study abroad participants and current international students as soon as possible after their return. These partnerships do not have to be focused on
language learning, though it would create an additional mutual benefit. American students could help their international partners to adjust to the collegiate environment and help them to feel welcome by inviting them to social events and other activities. In this way, study abroad participants will form diverse friendships reminiscent of the study abroad experience, and they will have further opportunity to develop a multicultural perspective. After studying abroad, participants in this study often incorporated new international friends into already existing friendships. If study abroad participants follow this trend and invite their global partners into existing friendship groups, more students on campus will be exposed to diverse perspectives. Global partnerships therefore have multiple benefits for study abroad participants, international students, and the larger community.

**Implications for Career Services Professionals.**

**Involvement in study abroad orientation sessions.**

Findings in this study suggest that participants are not taking advantage of the many career opportunities that exist abroad. It seems that prior to departure, participants were unaware that the study abroad experience might expose them to opportunities to network, seek internships or employment, visit potential graduate schools, or meet with others in their field for informational interviews. It is therefore recommended that Career Services professionals take a more active role in the predeparture orientation process to make students aware of the career opportunities available to them while abroad. They may also do workshops with students specifically aimed at preparing resumes and business cards to use in the international context. Students might also find it useful to learn about business etiquette specific to the host country.
Finally, Career Services professionals may recommend ways for students to seek out career-enhancing opportunities abroad.

**Developing a study abroad career plan.**

Great opportunity for career developmental gains exists for students while studying abroad. For example, participants may network with professionals in their field of study, pursue paid or unpaid internships, take advantage of service learning opportunities, explore graduate schools, or engage in informational interviewing. Unfortunately, the findings of this study suggest that study abroad participants typically do not take advantage of these career developmental opportunities. This may in part be due to their preoccupation with the many novel experiences beyond the “bubble,” but is likely also due to a lack of awareness of the opportunities available to them.

It is therefore recommended that Career Services professionals help students to recognize potential career developmental opportunities that may be available to them during foreign study. If students know what opportunities to look for, they may more readily take advantage of them. One strategy may be to encourage students to set specific career-related learning outcomes that would maximize their career development. Structured programs designed to support growth in specific learning outcomes have been found to be successful in areas related to intercultural and second-language learning (Vande Berg, 2009). It therefore stands to reason that structured career-focused programs might also support career-specific learning outcomes.

For that reason, Career Services professionals are encouraged to assist students in formulating a career plan for the foreign study experience. For instance, students may be given once monthly career-related tasks to accomplish while abroad. During the first month, they could
be encouraged to engage in a service learning opportunity related to their field of study. During the second month, they could seek an opportunity to shadow a professional in their chosen career field or a field that they find interesting, and so forth. A structured plan might better focus study abroad participants’ attention on potential learning outcomes, which in turn will help overturn the perception that study abroad is “little more than an extracurricular activity” (Posey, 2003, p. 5).

**Making career counseling available during the foreign study and upon return.**

This study presented compelling evidence of changes in students’ career choices and goals associated both during and after study abroad participation. Given that career exploration could cause significant anxiety and confusion for any student (Chickering and Reisser, 1993), Career Counselors are advised to make themselves readily available to study abroad participants. Their support is especially important in light of the fact that study abroad participants are removed from familiar support systems. To reach this goal, Career Services professionals may offer study abroad participants career counseling opportunities via the web, e-mail or telephone. Though host institutions may also offer career counseling resources to participants, students might find greater comfort in sharing their career exploration with professionals who are already familiar to them. For this reason, Career Counselors are encouraged to meet with students prior to their departure to inform them of the possible career-developmental outcomes of the study abroad experience. Not only will this awareness potentially help to prepare students for such changes, but it will also help put a face to the services available to them at the Career Center during and after their foreign study.
Career-focused debriefing sessions.

The findings of this study suggest that students struggle to clearly articulate the meaningfulness of the study abroad experience in terms of their professional development. Though they believe that study abroad participation will build their resume and give an edge over other job applicants without similar experiences, they seem unable to translate the experience in tangible terms. This study therefore supports findings by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI, 2008) indicating that students are often unable to “give meaning to their experience in a way that employers could identify” (p.4). Career Services professionals are therefore encouraged to conduct debriefing sessions with participants immediately following their return to help them to translate their experiences. These sessions should create a space for students to not only reflect upon the value of their experiences, but also the specific application of new knowledge and skills to their future careers.

The Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI, 2008) created a debriefing program called “Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experiences” aimed at: (a) connecting learning experiences with career preparation, (b) probing deeper reflection into the psychosocial growth associated with study abroad experiences, and (c) building confidence in the ability to articulate newly developed skills and competencies. Career Services professionals are encouraged to use this program to guide post study abroad debriefing sessions. CERI provided a list of transferable skills often associated with the study abroad experience that students should be able to articulate after the debriefing session. Table 32 contains an excerpt of CERI’s list of transferable skills that are supported by the findings in this study.
Table 32
*Transferable competencies and skills associated with study abroad participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Competencies and Skills</th>
<th>Workplace Competencies and Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work independently</td>
<td>Identifying alternative and creative solutions to problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to situations of change</td>
<td>Interacting with people who hold different interests, values, or perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying information to new or broader contexts</td>
<td>Resourceful in accomplishing assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being dependable</td>
<td>Understanding cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating ideas effectively</td>
<td>Working effectively with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveying ideas verbally</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaining knowledge from experiences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Table is adapted from Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI, 2008, p.4).*

**Implications for Campus Mental Health Professionals and Allied Professional Counselors.**

*Involvement in orientation programs.*

Participants in this study felt emotionally unprepared for the many internal and external challenges they faced while studying abroad. Though mandatory orientation programs prepared students for the logistics of living in a foreign culture, such programs seemingly failed to inform students of the full range of emotions that are commonly experienced by study abroad participants. These programs also reportedly failed to arm students with options for coping with their emotions in the absence of familiar support systems. It is therefore recommended that Campus Mental Health Professionals gain involvement in study abroad orientation sessions as experts teaching students about the emotional realities of the study abroad experience. Such sessions would normalize emotions that students might otherwise have felt overly concerned about as they experienced them abroad. It would also help students to realize that they will face both positive and negative experiences abroad that will likely invoke a range of emotions, in turn
readjusting unrealistic expectations of constant excitement and happiness. Campus Mental Health Professionals and Allied Professional Counselors should also help each student to identify effective coping styles that may be useful in a variety of situations (NAFSA, 2006). For instance, students could be encouraged to journal or blog about their experiences as a way to release emotions and make sense of their experiences (Spencer & Tuma, 2002).

**Making mental health resources available during the study abroad experience.**

In the absence of familiar support networks, existing mental health concerns may grow, or new mental health problems may surface as students face the stresses of cultural immersion (Fischer, 2010, June 2). For instance, participants in this study often felt unprepared to manage the depression associated with homesickness. Recognizing the reality of these and other mental health concerns, presenters at the 2010 annual meeting of NAFSA: Association of International Educators stressed that international educators should become prepared to respond to mental health crises that may arise during study abroad participation (Fischer, 2010, June 2). One way to prepare for this potential reality is to make students aware of mental health resources that will be available to them while they are abroad. For instance, students and program directors may be provided with a contact card listing important mental health resources at the host and home institutions. This would include numbers for the Campus Counseling Center, Dean of Students, Study Abroad Office, Campus Police, and local mental health agencies. If resources are not readily available at the host institution or in the local community, counselors are encouraged to schedule telephone, web, or Skype counseling sessions with study abroad participants as needed. This would also be an effective way to continue counseling with study abroad participants who
regularly attend counseling during the school year. These students may otherwise face significant anxiety knowing that they would have to cease counseling while abroad.

**Facilitating Debriefing.**

As mentioned heretofore, Campus Mental Health Professionals are encouraged to facilitate students’ debriefing upon returning to their home institutions. Counselors are trained to support students’ self-reflection and would therefore be particularly effective facilitators of this process (Komives et al., 2003). Participants in this study faced significant challenges while readjusting to former roles, lifestyles and friendships. Study Abroad administrators may be less attuned to the warning signs of major readjustment concerns than Campus Mental Health Counselors, who have received specialized diagnostic training. Also, Counselors are in the unique position to offer continued counseling if it is in the students’ best interest (Komives, et al., 2003). Study Abroad administrators are not trained to foster therapeutic relationships with students, nor do they typically have the time to devote to such endeavors. It is therefore recommended that Campus Mental Health Professionals take a more active role in helping students to make sense of the personal significance of their study abroad experiences.

**Implications for Administrators.**

Given the many ways that students develop as part of the study abroad experience, administrators in all departments should advocate for the study abroad participation of the students they encounter. A noteworthy number of respondents chose to participate in foreign study because they were encouraged by others to do so. Respondents recalled inspirational conversations with professors and administrators as early as high school or freshman year of college. Interestingly, each of the participants in this study who completed foreign study during
their freshman years participated in at least one other foreign study program during college. It therefore seems that it is never too early to plant the seed for study abroad participation. As resources and viable opportunities become available, students may be more inclined to pursue opportunities if they are supported in such pursuits.

It is therefore recommended that administrators and student advisors take every opportunity to get students excited about future study abroad experiences. Faculty members are further encouraged to invite prior study abroad participants or Study Abroad Advisors to speak to students to classroom or student organizations to maximize students’ exposure to study abroad opportunities.

**Implications for Higher Education research.**

Through this research with undergraduate students who participate in study abroad programs, additional areas for potential research emerged. First, it was interesting that participants in this study appeared to be able to identify gaps in their learning and academic performance as they adapted to their classrooms abroad. Several participants were shocked to discover the academic rigor of their foreign classes, and found that they had to push themselves much harder academically than at SU. One participant recognized that American students “get babied a lot when it comes to our educational system.” Others noted that they were not on an equal footing with their international peers, who seemed more knowledgeable about world history and politics. In light of recent research findings discussed in the book, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Arum & Roksa, 2011), it seems especially noteworthy that students seem self-reflective about some of the gaps in American Higher Education that researchers are only now starting to identify as problematic. The findings of this
study therefore point to a new direction of research where study abroad participants could help shed more light on the challenges of American education when compared to foreign institutions.

Second, as it became apparent that participants in this study felt underprepared for the challenges of adapting to a foreign culture, a need arose to further examine study abroad orientation programs for content and emphasis. It would be particularly interesting to examine orientation programs both at the home and host institutions in order to identify gaps in the preparation process so that more appropriate programs may be designed and implemented in both locations.

Third, given that students face many unique challenges while studying abroad, a need exists to explore what kinds of resources are available to students at the host institutions or within the local communities. At many institutions in the United States, students are offered career and mental health counseling free of charge when the need arises. However, it is unclear whether host institutions share a similar student-centered focus, and what specific resources study abroad students have access to, and at what cost. This information would be beneficial to inform practice at the home institution, as it might be that a lack of resources would require career and mental health counselors to make themselves more readily available to study abroad participants.

Fourth, several participants in this study were encouraged by their professors to pursue foreign study opportunities. Given that certain academic disciplines have higher numbers of study abroad participants than others, it would be interesting to survey faculty advisors across academic disciplines to examine whether this discrepancy might be due to professors in some academic disciplines being more actively supportive of study abroad participation than others.
The findings of the current study suggest that all students may benefit from foreign study experiences, and it is not necessarily more beneficial for students from a particular major or degree program. Findings of the suggested research would therefore help identify academic disciplines that should more actively recruit participants for future foreign study.

Finally, though the findings of the current study sheds light on the psychosocial and career development of study abroad participants, the study is limited in that it focused on retrospective accounts of students’ experiences abroad and the perceived effects of such experiences as senior year students. Hutchins (1996) believed that college students need within six months to a few years to fully understand the vocational implications of their study abroad experience. It would therefore be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study to explore the ways that foreign study informs students’ psychosocial and career development beyond graduation. The researcher might choose to gather baseline data of psychosocial development prior to study abroad participation, and then compare it to data gathered while students were abroad, upon their return, at graduation, a year after graduation, and again at the five year mark. Following study abroad participants’ growth and development systematically over time will provide a more accurate reflection of the long term effects of the study abroad experience on psychosocial and career development.

**Implications for Higher Education policy.**

The exploration into the essences of students’ study abroad experiences that are most meaningful to psychosocial development raised important policy implications related to access and affordability of study abroad programs to diverse students. It also raised concerns regarding institutional responsibility towards students while they are partaking in study abroad programs.
Finally, issues of accountability to study abroad programs and partnerships emerged. A discussion of these critical areas of Higher Education Policy follows.

Access.

Historically, the typical study abroad participant has been a wealthy (Lewin, 2009) female student studying abroad during her junior year of college while pursuing academic programs in art, history, political science, foreign language, and humanities (Hoffa & Pearson, 1997). As the socio-economic status of participants was not the primary focus of the study, the researcher did not explicitly seek financial information. It is therefore difficult to determine the socio-economic status of participants accurately. Although most participants in this study did not express great financial need, several considered the availability of scholarships and funding sources a primary determinant of study abroad participation. One student in particular was limited in the ability to pursue a semester-long study abroad program because her status as student athlete required an on-campus presence during the regular school year. Interview data therefore suggests that several participants in this study may experience some level of financial need.

On the other hand, a degree of privilege may be assumed for the nearly forty percent of participants who were able to complete multiple study abroad programs, as they were not limited by significant connections to jobs or responsibilities on the SU campus. Institutional data from the Survey of National Engagement (NSSE) confirm that students at SU fall significantly below the mean with regards to working for pay off campus and providing care for dependents when compared to other Southern institutions and institutions in the Carnegie peer class. SU’s population has therefore tended to be more privileged.
Apart from socio-economic status, the research findings reflect that the majority of participants in this study were Caucasian females, pursuing degrees in the Applied Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Only one participant represented the Physical and Natural Sciences. According to institutional records, this is not uncharacteristic of the typical SU student who partakes in study abroad programs. It is also not uncharacteristic of the history of study abroad as mentioned heretofore, as well as recent national trends. The Institute for International Education (2010) reported that the majority of study abroad participants during the 2008-2009 academic year were pursuing degrees in the Social Sciences and Business, while only 3.2 percent of participants were in the Engineering field and 1.6 percent were pursuing math and computer science degrees. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that despite sincere efforts in recent years to increase accessibility of study abroad opportunities to minority students (Brux & Fry, 2010) and male students (Shirley, 2006) in diverse fields, there remains work to be done. This is true nationally as well as locally at SU.

Institutional policies should be refined to ensure that the benefits of study abroad participation are available to all students. To meet this goal, the underrepresentation of academic disciplines and minority students must be overcome in the following ways. First, institutions must create diverse programs that are not only language driven, but focused on specific academic disciplines that are currently underrepresented, such as the Formal and Natural Sciences. Though the majority of participants in this study were motivated by language immersion, foreign language learning was not the primary objective of all participants. It stands to reason that this is also true of the population of students on college campuses who are interested in studying abroad; some students might be more motivated by programs in their academic area of focus.
Such programs should therefore be made more readily available throughout the semester, and also during the summer months. Summer programs may be especially valuable for students who aim to graduate in four years, or those who are bound to their home campuses during the regular school year because of scholarship restrictions.

Second, it is important that institutions increase outreach to minority groups, including students with disabilities. Although recent legal cases have sheltered higher education institutions from a legal obligation to make programs equally accessible to students with disabilities (Soneson & Cordano, 2009), study abroad program directors are encouraged to establish policies that would extend the benefit of study abroad participation to this population of students as well. Though the relevance of United States disability rights laws to foreign study programs remains unclear, reasonable accommodations abroad are an especially important consideration for those institutions that are requiring all students to study abroad prior to graduation (Soneson & Cordano, 2009). If such accommodations cannot be made, Soneson and Cordano ask, “Is there an equivalent experience the student can have in the U.S. that will achieve the objective sought by requiring study abroad experiences?” (Soneson & Cordana, 2009, p.271). Their question is especially complex given the many unique benefits of study abroad participation supported by the findings of this study. The multifaceted issues surrounding study abroad access to students with disability should be addressed more clearly by institutional and national policy makers to clarify institutional responsibility and operational procedures.

Affordability.

Participants in this study spoke of the importance of funding opportunities in their decisions to study abroad. A few participants chose their study abroad destinations based solely
on the fact that they were able to receive full funding for that particular program. In essence, this means that even though there may have been other programs that might have been more relevant to their academic interests, they did not pursue these opportunities because funding was not equally available. Another student had to study abroad during the summer because, as a student athlete, her college funding depended on her campus presence during the academic year. If she had desired to study abroad for a full semester, she would have forfeited her athletic scholarship. Funding is not only a concern for students and their families. SU institutional records indicate that budgetary restrictions caused summer scholarships to be eliminated during the 2009-2010 academic year, leading to declines in study abroad participation from the previous year. It is therefore clear that affordability and funding remain critical issues in international education.

Given the realities of affordability concerns, it is not surprising that of the 14 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States, less than 1 percent are able to participate in study abroad (Jenkins & Skelly, 2004). Legislators and university presidents alike have lofty goals of increasing these numbers. The University of Virginia has set a public goal of increasing study abroad participation to 80 percent of all students by the year 2020 (Hindman, 2003, September 24). In 2006, the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program proposed the lofty goal of sending one million American students to study abroad annually by the 2016-2017 academic year (BaileyShea, 2009). To bring this goal to fruition, the Commission proposed that government funds be allocated for one year nonrenewable student scholarships to a maximum of $5,000. Likewise, the Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad commissioned by NAFSA: Association of International Educators requested that $3.5 billion in governmental funds be provided annually to support a half a million
study abroad scholarships (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003). Given the multifaceted challenges of today’s economic climate, it is not surprising that these recommendations have not been accepted.

The impetus therefore lies on institutions to find creative funding sources for study abroad scholarships. The findings of this study revealed a potential funding source for student scholarships. Participants in this study were very positive about the benefits of the study abroad experience, and recommended that all students take part in study abroad programs. Given their enthusiasm for study abroad, alumni might be willing to donate towards a study abroad scholarship fund to give other students the opportunity to share in these experiences. If their abroad experiences were overwhelmingly positive and shaped their development in some way, study abroad alumni might be willing to invest in the development of other students post graduation.

A study by Brux and Ngoboka (2002) revealed that financial constraints are one of the primary reasons for a lack of study abroad participation among racial and ethnic minority students. It is also imperative that study abroad program directors do everything possible to offer low cost programs to students, which includes creating programs in non-traditional locations. Non-Eurocentric programs may prove to be less expensive, and paired with a lower cost of living, might be more attractive to students from low income families. Specifically for this population, Jenkins (2002) explained that the added benefit of programs in non-traditional locations is that they may “reveal the global interconnectedness of problems once thought to be local” (p. 50). In addition to Non-Eurocentric programs, a wide range of short-term programs
should be made available, as these are typically less expensive than semester or year-long programs (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

**Accountability.**

The findings of this study indicated that major life events may occur while students are studying abroad. Participants in this study lost loved ones, faced major health and minor mental health concerns, and took great risks that often put them in physical danger. Given these experiences, an emergent policy implication is the importance of formulating policies to govern institutional response to adverse life events of study abroad participants. It is also important that steps be taken to minimize the institution’s liability in these situations (NAFSA, 2006).

As an example, recognizing the reality of the potential exacerbation of mental health concerns during foreign study, presenters at the 2010 annual meeting of NAFSA: Association of International Educators stressed that international educators should become prepared to respond to mental health crises that may arise during study abroad participation (Fischer, 2010, June 2). A major complication to adequate institutional response during study abroad participants’ mental health crises is that program directors typically do not have access to students’ medical records (NAFSA, 2006). To overcome this obstacle, students should be encouraged to disclose any mental-health or medical concerns voluntarily predeparture. Once this medical information is shared, students may work together with Campus Mental Health Counselors or Campus Medical Staff to formulate long-distance treatment plans (NAFSA, 2006).

Institutional policies should be created to manage emergency situations and to govern institutional responses to a wide range of emergencies. The Interorganizational Task Force on Safety and Responsibility in Study Abroad (2001) stressed the importance of making parents and
students aware of their responsibilities as well as policies related to the limits of institutional responsibilities when crises emerge abroad. Although the aforementioned task force published a manual outlining such responsibilities, its application is limited due to the fact that these policy suggestions were made ten years ago. A need therefore exists for updated resources to guide institutional policy decisions regarding appropriate responses to emerging crises of study abroad participants.

More recently, the professional organization, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, has responded to the reality of study abroad participants’ mental health concerns by publishing a manual to help administrators make decisions regarding policies and institutional responses. This e-publication is titled, *Best Practices in Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting Education Abroad Participants* (NAFSA, 2006). Administrators should use this resource freely during policy planning. Professional organizations are encouraged to offer additional best practices to guide institutional responses to other possible emergency situations that may arise during foreign study.

A second emergent policy implication relates to accountability measures surrounding study abroad partnerships and programmatic offerings. Given the unfortunate reality that study abroad has gained a wide reputation as “little more than an extracurricular activity” (Posey, 2003, p. 5) with a focus of foreign travel, not learning (Burness, 2009, September 21), institutions need to be diligent in ensuring that the study abroad opportunities they make available to students relate to tangible learning objectives. Accrediting bodies like the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS, 2008) explicitly require institutions to justify consensual relationships and contractual agreements as they relate to the purpose of the
institution. To ensure compliance with accreditation standards, institutions therefore have a responsibility to offer foreign study programs that directly relate to the mission and values of the institution. Study abroad program directors should carefully and periodically evaluate available programs in terms of desired learning outcomes and competencies. A few participants in this study shared that they had taken part in planned group activities abroad that were seemingly not directly related to the curriculum and seemed to be a poor use of their time. This raises a concern for accreditation. Program directors should be held accountable to ensure that all structured extracurricular activities abroad relate directly to classroom curriculum or to desired psychosocial competencies. Burness (2009, September 21) agreed that “an institution needs to understand its mission and how the proposed programming and physical collaborations will reinforce not distort the mission.”

**Summary.**

This phenomenological qualitative research study sought to explore the psychosocial and career development of undergraduate students who participate in study abroad programs during their college careers. In person semi-structured interviews with 40 participants were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. Five major themes emerged from speaking to senior year students who studied abroad. These themes included: (a) It was just great expectations!; (b) Beyond the “bubble”; (c) Life is all about the people you meet; (d) I grew more than I can ever remember; and (e) I’m more confident in my ability to be successful.

Study abroad participation was found to inform the psychosocial and career development of the participants of this study. Psychosocial growth and development occurred along the first six vectors described by Chickering and Reisser (1993), including: developing competence,
managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose. As to career development, it was found that the study abroad experience did inform the career decision-making of participants, including: exploring vocational options, committing to a particular occupation, and taking steps to prepare for a future career. Findings did not support gains in study abroad participants’ professional identity. Furthermore, career development of participants in this study was found to be a multifaceted process supported by gains in development along previous vectors during and after study abroad participation.

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made to inform the future practice of Study Abroad Administrators, Career Services Professionals, Mental Health Professionals and Allied Professional Counselors, and Administrators. Implications for future research were also offered. Finally, the findings of this study revealed emergent issues related to access and affordability of study abroad opportunities for diverse students, institutional responsibility to students while abroad, and institutional accountability related to the offering of programs and formation of institutional partnerships.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OR LIST OF REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Comp, D. J. (2000). Undergraduate sojourner change as a result of a study abroad experience. Unpublished Master’s Thesis: The University of Nebraska.


n=3894.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
APPENDIX A

Sample Invitation Letter

Department of Leadership of Leadership and Counselor Education
The School of Education at The University of Mississippi
117 Guyton Hall
University, MS 38677

[Date]

Dear Student,

My name is Vera Van Der Vyver. I am currently a Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Administration program in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education through the School of Education at the University of Mississippi. My research focuses on the psychosocial and career development of undergraduate students who have studied abroad. I am interested in this topic because as an international student, I hold great appreciation for the opportunities associated with foreign study. Also, through part-time employment in Career Services and Study Abroad, I have grown extremely interested in the impact of study abroad participation on the career development and decision making of undergraduate students.

As part of my dissertation, I plan to conduct several one-on-one audio recorded interviews with senior-year students who have studied abroad to any country, for any length of time, and at any time during undergraduate study. You are reading this letter because the Study Abroad Office or one of your peers may have identified you as a person who may be interested in talking with me about your experiences, particularly as these experiences relate to your personal growth and decisions you may have made regarding your future career and life goals. I would be honored to hear about your study abroad experiences! Participation will require about one hour of your time, and you will receive a $5 Smoothie King gift card as a thank-you for your participation.

Please contact me if you are interested and willing to participate in an interview about your experiences. If you have any further questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me so that I may clarify your questions before you make the decision to participate or not. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,
Vera Van Der Vyver, M.Ed, LPC
Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education
vera@olemiss.edu
(662) 915-7069
APPENDIX B

Sample Student Information Sheet

Pseudonym:

What is your age:

What ethnicity do you identify most with?

Are you a Senior Year student attending [Southeastern University]? If so, 4th or 5th year Senior?

What degree are you seeking?

What is your major/minor?

Are you in the Honor’s College?

Please fill out the following details about the time(s) that you studied abroad while attending Ole Miss (please list all):

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country of Host Institution / Study Abroad Program</th>
<th>Term/Year</th>
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Did you complete K-12 schooling in the USA?

What is your home state?

Did you ever study or live abroad (not just vacation) while in K-12?
APPENDIX C
APPENDIX C

Final Interview Protocol

Date: 
Time: 
Place: 

Interviewer:  Vera V. Chapman

Interviewee:

Standard Procedures:

The participant will be interviewed in a neutral, quiet place for at least 45 minutes. The interviewer will give each participant an informed consent form, which is to be signed before any questions are asked. Once consent is given, the interviewer will turn on the digital voice recorder, and start the interview. Questions may be asked in any sequence, and prompts may be added as they are needed. Upon completion of the interview, the interviewer will thank the participant for their contribution, and turn off the digital voice recorder. Next, a brief debriefing will follow. Finally, the interviewer will give the interviewee a $5 Smoothie King gift voucher before they depart, to thank them for their time and contribution to the research project.

Interview Questions:

1. Thinking about your most recent study abroad experience, describe for me what it was like for you to study abroad.

2. What initially drew you to participate in a study abroad program?

3. What was the most memorable experience you had while studying abroad?

4. What was the most challenging experience you had while studying abroad, and what did you learn from it?

5. Please describe what you learned about yourself during your study abroad experience.
6. In what ways did the study abroad experience inform, change, or reinforce your personal growth and development?

7. What were your career goals prior to studying abroad?

8. While abroad, did you experience anything specific that may have caused you to reflect upon your career and life goals?

9. In what ways did the study abroad experience inform, change, or reinforce your current career and/or academic goals?

10. Please describe the specific experiences during your study abroad that were most impactful to your career goals and career development.

11. Do you believe that participation in a study abroad experience better prepared you for your future career? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

12. What would you say was the biggest personal benefit you gained from studying abroad?

13. As you think about your future, how will your study abroad experience inform your work and life plans/choices in the future?

14. I wonder what has changed for you, if anything, since your return from your last study abroad experience?

15. Given our conversation today, do you know of another student who might want to talk to me about their study abroad experiences?

---

Thank-you statement:

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. It has been very valuable in strengthening my understanding about the ways that study abroad can shape the personal and career development of its participants. If you should later find that you would like
to add something to our discussion that you may not have thought of today, please contact me. I would be glad to talk with you about your experiences further. What questions do you have for me?
APPENDIX D
APPENDIX D

Initial Interview Protocol

Date: 
Time: 
Place: 

Interviewer: Vera V. Chapman

Interviewee:

Standard Procedures:

The participant will be interviewed in a neutral, quiet place for at least 45 minutes. The interviewer will give each participant an informed consent form, which is to be signed before any questions are asked. Once consent is given, the interviewer will turn on the digital voice recorder, and start the interview. Questions may be asked in any sequence, and prompts may be added as they are needed. Upon completion of the interview, the interviewer will thank the participant for their contribution, and turn off the digital voice recorder. Next, a brief debriefing will follow. Finally, the interviewer will give the interviewee a $5 Smoothie King gift voucher before they depart, to thank them for their time and contribution to the research project.

Interview Questions:

1. Thinking about your most recent study abroad experience, describe for me what it was like for you to study abroad.

2. What initially drew you to participate in a study abroad program?

3. What was the most memorable experience you had while studying abroad?

4. What was the most challenging experience you had while studying abroad, and what did you learn from it?

5. Please describe what you learned about yourself during your study abroad experience.
6. In what ways did the study abroad experience inform, change, or reinforce your personal growth and development?

7. What were your career goals prior to studying abroad?

8. While abroad, did you experience anything specific that may have caused you to reflect upon your career and life goals?

9. In what ways did the study abroad experience inform, change, or reinforce your current career and/or academic goals?

10. Please describe the specific experiences during your study abroad that were most impactful to your career goals and career development.

11. Do you believe that participation in a study abroad experience better prepared you for your future career? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

12. What would you say was the biggest personal benefit you gained from studying abroad?

13. As you think about your future, how will your study abroad experience inform your work and life plans/choices in the future?

14. Given our conversation today, do you know of another student who might want to talk to me about their study abroad experiences?

Thank-you statement:

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. It has been very valuable in strengthening my understanding about the ways that study abroad can shape the personal and career development of its participants. If you should later find that you would like to add something to our discussion that you may not have thought of today, please contact me. I
would be glad to talk with you about your experiences further. What questions do you have for me?
APPENDIX E

Sample Consent Form

Information about a Qualitative Research Study

Title of Study: Beyond the “Bubble:” Study Abroad and the Psychosocial and Career Development of Undergraduates

Investigator
Vera Van Der Vyver
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education, School of Education
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7069
vera@olemiss.edu

Advisor
Amy E. Wells-Dolan, Ph.D.
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education, School of Education
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7069
aewells@olemiss.edu

Description
The researchers in this study are interested in exploring the career development and decision-making processes of undergraduate students who have participated in study abroad experiences. In order to explore this topic fully, we ask that you participate in an hour-long interview in which you will have the opportunity to share your experiences with us. The questions will focus on your personal experiences during and after your study abroad program, particularly as these experiences relate to your personal and career development. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will explain the research project to you and you may ask any questions that surface about the project.

Risks and Benefits
During the interview process, you will be asked to reflect upon experiences you had while studying abroad. This discussion might jog your memory about experiences that may have been difficult for you, and some of the questions in this study may therefore be uncomfortable for you to answer. Also, if your career choice and future goals have not yet been decided, you may feel uncomfortable addressing these issues in the questions asked of you. Although personal reflection can lead to discomfort, it may also lead you to better understand the significance of your study abroad experiences, serving as a catalyst for your professional and personal growth.

Cost and Payments
The individual interview will take approximately one hour to finish. Other than your time, there are no other costs for helping us with this study. You will be given a $5 Smoothie King gift card as a small thank you for participating in this study.
Confidentiality
Throughout the life of the research project, I will not use your name or any identifying information during the recorded interview or in any of my reporting notes. Students may be asked to provide basic demographic information, which may include but is not limited to gender, age, major, and the length and location of their study abroad experience. To prevent anyone from being able to identify you, the research study will use a pseudonym for the university that you currently attend. Therefore, I assure you that I will take every precaution to protect your information so that you will not be identified from any of the collected information. The data and results of the study will be shared with a doctoral dissertation committee in order to facilitate my learning as a researcher. The recording of your interview will be destroyed when the research project is completed.

Right to Withdraw
You are under no obligation to take part in this study. If you would like to stop your participation at any point during the study, you will not be penalized in any way. Simply inform Vera V. Chapman with your decision in person, by email (vera@olemiss.edu), or telephone (662-801-4882). Your standing with The University of Mississippi will in no way be affected by your choice to withdraw from the study, and you will not lose any of the benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision to participate or to withdraw will remain confidential.

IRB Approval
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.
Release of Rights to Written or Recorded Information
My signature below indicates that I release all rights, including copyright rights for the use of any recorded or written information that I provided during this study. With this release, I grant the University of Mississippi and the aforementioned researchers the permission to use, reproduce, copy, and distribute my words in whole or in part into derivative works without limitation. I indemnify and hold the University and the researchers harmless from any claims of infringement of copyright by any third party regarding my words. I agree that I will receive no further consideration and no royalty payments for the use of my words.

My signature below means that I agree to all of the above terms.

________________________________________
Signature

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Date
## United States Regions

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA
VERA V. CHAPMAN, Ph.D., LPC
2031 West Wellsgate Drive • Oxford, MS 38655 • (662) 801-4882 • vera@olemiss.edu

EDUCATION

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi
Department of Leadership and Counselor Education - Higher Education
Ph.D. Graduation: Spring ‘11 - GPA: 4.0
Dissertation Fellowship, Awarded for Spring ‘11
Graduate School Council Research Grant, Awarded for the ’10 – ’11 Academic Year
Summer Graduate Research Assistantship Program, Awarded for Summer ‘10
Dissertation: Beyond the “Bubble:” Study Abroad and the Psychosocial and Career Development of Undergraduates.

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi
Master of Education (M.Ed) Counselor Education, May ‘08 - GPA: 4.0
Masters Initiative Scholarship, Awarded for duration of study

University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa
Bachelor of Arts (Honors) (B.A. Hons) Psychology, December ‘05 - GPA: 4.0
Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, August ‘04- August ‘05

Pretoria University, Pretoria, South Africa
Bachelor of Science (B.S.) Human Physiology, Genetics and Psychology, December ‘03 - GPA: 3.5

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

EDHE 671: College and the Student, Teaching Assistant, The University of Mississippi, Spring ‘11
EDLD 105: Freshman Seminar (Luckyday Scholars), Instructor, The University of Mississippi, Fall ‘11
COUN 682: Family Counseling, Teaching Assistant, The University of Mississippi, Spring ‘10
EDLD 704: Qualitative Research Inquiry (Higher Education), Teaching Assistant, The University of Mississippi, Summer ‘09
EDLD 301: Career and Life Planning, Teaching Assistant, The University of Mississippi, Fall ‘09
LIBA 105: Mental Health in the Movies, Co-instructor, The University of Mississippi, Spring ‘08
EDHE 101: Academic Skills for College, Instructor, The University of Mississippi, Spring ‘08
EDHE 202: Fundamentals of Active Learning, Instructor, The University of Mississippi, Fall '06 to Spring '07
Psychology Tutor, The University of Mississippi, Spring '06 to Fall '06
Psychology Tutor, University of Stellenbosch, Spring '04 to Summer '04

STUDENT AFFAIRS EXPERIENCE

The University of Mississippi, Office of Health Promotion
Graduate Assistant for BASICS, January '07- December ‘10
- Counseling – Assessed court and judicially mandated college students for alcohol and drug abuse / dependence; Utilized individual talk therapy and group therapy with students focusing on their alcohol and drug use and its impact on various areas of their lives, incl. academic, professional, and personal.
- Education – Educated students about ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle, especially as it relates to alcohol and drug use in an individual setting, as well as through campus-wide programming and presentations; Referred students to various campus resources and programs, when appropriate.
- Administration – Managed and coded the client database.
- Strategic Planning – Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Policy Task Force (January ‘09 – August ‘10); University of Mississippi Recovery Community Strategic Planning Committee (May ‘09 – May ‘10)

The University of Mississippi, Career Center
Graduate Assistant, January ‘08- December ’09
- Counseling / Assessment - Presented group interpretations of the Myers-Briggs and Strong Interest Inventories.
- Administration – Performed basic administrative duties, including answering telephones and assisting walk-ins; Updated presentations to keep them relevant to the changing needs of the student body; Completed performance and activity reports once every semester.
- Education - Presented career educational programs, such as mock interviews and group/individual sessions about career development and professional resume and cover letter writing; Assisted students with job search programs, including MonsterTrak, CareerBeam and EmployOn; Trained students in relevant software programs, including Optimal Resume; Critiqued student resumes and cover letters to enhance impact and effectiveness; Assisted in teaching EDLD 301: ‘Career Life Planning.’
- Programming – Assisted in event planning, including career fairs and on-campus interviews.

The University of Mississippi, Study Abroad Office
Practicum Student, January ’09- May ’09
- Advising – Advised students regarding upcoming study abroad opportunities and answered related questions
- Programming – Assisted in event planning activities, including student programming activities, the Mississippi Gathering, and the Study Abroad Fair; Oriented international exchange students to The University of Mississippi.
• **Marketing** – Created marketing materials for the office, including coffee-table picture books and mass mailings about upcoming social events.
• **Assessment** – Created follow-up surveys for students returning from their study abroad experiences.
• **Supervision** – Oversaw 15 Global Ambassadors and communicated their duties and upcoming engagements.
• **Administration** – Updated student files with important documents, such as copies of their passports; Corresponded with stakeholders, including professors and our international partner institutions.

**ADDITIONAL COUNSELING EXPERIENCE**

**Oxford Play Therapy Training Institute (OPTTI), Oxford, Mississippi**  
*Counselor and Play Therapist*, January ’07- May ’08  
Engaged in individual talk therapy with adult clients using Integrative therapy techniques; Assessed clients using personality inventories, for personal and career counseling purposes; Counseled youth aged 5-17 utilizing Play Therapy (with children) and talk therapy (with adolescents); Conducted intake interviews with prospective clients.

**Lafayette County and Oxford County School Districts, Oxford, Mississippi**  
*Counselor Intern / Play Therapist*, January ’07- November ’07  
Offered creative art therapy, play therapy, and talk therapy interventions with children from lower elementary and upper elementary schools; Engaged in individual talk therapy with diverse population of middle school students; Facilitated relationship-focused group counseling sessions with 8 middle school females.

**The University of Mississippi, Counseling Center**  
*Intake Interviewer (Volunteer)*, February ’06- May ’06  
Conducted intake interviews with new clients; Assessed suicide risk, and referred to staff counselors accordingly.

**Youth Villages, Memphis Boys Town, Memphis, Tennessee**  
*Residential Teacher-Counselor (Intern)*, May ’05- August ’05  
Conducted individual therapy with 14-18 year-old male juvenile sex offenders; Co-lead group therapy interventions with 15 clients from the same population.

**ADDITIONAL TRAINING & CERTIFICATION**

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the state of Mississippi since December ’09
Start Smart Facilitator (AAUW Wage Project) since ’10
RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Cockrell, C., Magruder, M., & Van Der Vyver, V. (2009, December). Time to Set the Stage for Graduate Student Career Services. SoACE Conference, Nashville, TN.


PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society – The University of Mississippi, Member since ‘10
NCDA - National Career Development Association, Member since ‘08
NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, Member since ‘08
Student Personnel Association - The University of Mississippi, Member since ’08; Treasurer ’09-’10
Chi Sigma Iota, Epsilon Mu Chapter – The University of Mississippi, Member since ’06; President ’07-’08
NSCS - National Society for Collegiate Scholars – Clemson University, Member since ’05

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi
Reader and Scribe, January ’06 – May ’06

Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina
Peer Health Educator, January ’05 – May ’05

The University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa
HIV/AIDS Counselor (Volunteer), January ’04 - August ’04

References Available Upon Request