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The Beneficial and Consequential Effects of Study Abroad Programs

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Introduction

It is argued that Americans have a supremacist complex deeply rooted within the structure of society; we have an air of arrogance and a supercilious sense of superiority over surrounding nations in terms of power, technology, and most notably education. But why is this Americentric view seemingly interminable? It may be that Americans' skewed view of the world has been encoded from decades of intolerance, or perhaps it is just a subconscious principle that American preeminence is the only way — the *right* way of life. Regardless of what fuels the fire, there are consequences that have risen because of a hesitancy to assimilate with other cultures. We are wholly consumed by proliferating our language, religions, and customs onto other nations that we never allow different cultures to be integrated into their own. Schools alone cannot provide courses that can teach students how to be culturally aware and knowledgeable; however, study abroad programs can close this gap, and allow for enculturation to be fully tangible. The lack of motivation to promote and encourage such opportunities has been a large obstruction in the development and progression of study abroad programs in the United States, but the need to cultivate global literacy is pushing to overturn these obstacles.

In the past decade study abroad programs have become more accessible to students, allowing them to gain a cultural perspective through direct immersion and experience. However, the expansion thus far has exposed multiple flaws within overseas programs that are being concentrated on in order to amplify the benefits. Ultimately, both beneficial and consequential effects of study abroad programs will be addressed in this paper in order to identify what the advantages of these programs are, what needs to be altered or improved, and what is currently being done to fix the issues to make students' time overseas the most constructive.

The positive features will include opportunities to travel, to learn new languages, experience different cultures, find ones strengths, develop work skills, form relationships with native peoples, expand ones worldview, and create future job opportunities. The negative aspects will focus on unequal opportunities for certain ethnic groups, financial costs, culture shock, separation from family, friends, significant others, and language barriers. Positive and negative aspects are supported by quantitative and qualitative research; information was gleaned from online articles, statistical databases, an online survey, and personal interviews. This report compares statistical information over a span of ten years (2000-2010), regarding the number of student participants, the top 10 chosen destinations, the types of programs chosen, the percentage of male to female participants, and several other variables on a local and national scale. The conclusion of this proposal will be drawn from the comparison of all forms of collected data in order to come up with an accurate understanding of the beneficial and consequential effects of study abroad programs.

Rationale/Background Information

The ability to communicate effectively is timeless, however it is useless if the communication is unidirectional. The interaction between the United States and foreign nations is increasing, but citizens are not equipped with the skills to converse, negotiate and successfully do business with people from various regions. The federal government is cognizant of this lack of knowledge, and has made it a national concern to solve the problem. The United States Senate issued a resolution deeming 2006 as the “Year of Study Abroad”; the document listed 13 reasons why study abroad programs are crucial to learning how to cope with globalization, economic interdependence, and worldwide communication.¹

Some of the main points assert that study abroad programs will act as an avenue to make citizens “globally literate”; that foreign interaction will create “cultural awareness,” and will “empower students to better understand themselves and others through a comparison of cultural values and ways of life.”¹ Study abroad programs are not just for individual gain, but rather a nationwide opportunity to secure economic stability by means of spreading global competence (which the U.S. is in dire need of). Included in this resolution is a statistic regarding just how incompetent American citizens are; it states, “87% of students in the United States between the ages of 18 and 24 cannot locate Iraq on a world map, 83% cannot find Afghanistan, 58% cannot find Japan, and 11% cannot even find the United States.”¹ These intellectual inadequacies are indisputably alarming, but understandable because of America’s history of discrimination, disinterest, and ignorance of other cultures.

It is this lack of understanding that causes conflict; case in point, the bombing of the twin towers. The Association of International Education’s (NAFSA) Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad, congruently states, “We strongly believe that the events of September 11, 2001, constituted a wake-up call — a warning that America’s ignorance of the world is now a national liability.”² For the movement towards a more united world to be plausible, there must be added attention on the need for international programs. The rationale behind this proposal is to identify if study abroad programs have truly made a difference in educating the youth of America thus far; it will explore how the programs are valuable, in addition to identifying the major implications that are placed on the lives of participants during their stay abroad.

Positive Attributes of Study Abroad Programs: Learning a New Language

Information collected from various databases illustrates many positives on behalf of study abroad programs. For starters, living in a foreign country for an extended amount of time elicits cultural immersion, making it an optimal time to learn a language. According to Mark Ashwill³ “Foreign language proficiency is one of those skills that cannot be honed, polished, and perfected within the borders of this country,” because language learning becomes facilitated when one is surrounded by indigenous peoples who regularly speak the native dialect. Living in a country like Spain or Japan forces a student to plunge head first into the abyss of unknown languages, because they have two choices: sink or swim. Many can pick up on a language relatively quickly, because there is an eagerness to learn, and there is constant reinforcement. Ultimately, “The hope is that some students will ‘see the light,’ develop a passion for the target language and culture, inject fresh blood into the anemic upper division courses, and be well on their way

toward bilingualism and biculturalism.” Students will have the upper hand in the eyes of an employer. Ones that have lived in a foreign country for some time tend to be more “self-motivated, independent, willing to embrace challenges, and able to cope with diverse problems and situations”, all of which are ideal and useful traits in the workforce.

Absorbing New Cultures Through Experience and Travel

Living in an unfamiliar place is frightening, but enlightening nonetheless. Going into an exotic new culture with an open-mind allows for a student to become somewhat of a sponge, soaking up beliefs, values and mindsets of a very different ethos. This opportunity is so valuable; because, in turn, it allows a student to truly understand where his or her own culture comes from, and where cultural overlaps occur. Study abroad programs allow for students to physically feel and smell and taste certain aspects of history, something a textbook simply cannot offer. Helen Gaudette, Director of College Preparatory Programs at Queens College, CUNY, says, “The ground speaks. When you stand on the place where a historical event took place...it fires the imagination, and the event and the people become more real”.⁴ Seeing the enigma that is Wiltshire’s Stonehenge, and walking through the gothic-style Milan cathedral in Italy is far more culturally stimulating and aesthetically pleasing than merely reading about such structures on the pages of textbooks.

Meeting New Peoples

Imagine having the opportunity to share personal stories of one’s own lifestyle and custom with a native Englishman over tea and crumpets, or with an avid football fan in a crowded stadium in Madrid. Befriending people in every country and city one visits is hugely advantageous because the natives know where the best pubs are, and where to find the most breathtaking views; they live there, after all. To get the most authentic experience, one must step out of his or her comfort zone, and avoid the security of staying with people of their own customs. Many students “take courses from U.S. university professors, and socialize chiefly with one another...while gaining fluency, they may not be acquiring cross-cultural competence,”⁵ which is what study abroad programs aspire to achieve. The goal is to create a “cultural bridge” that will link together native cultures and foreign ones, so that students have a greater sense of their own beliefs and see both themselves and society in a new light.

Negative Attributes of Study Abroad Programs

Criticisms of Study Abroad Program’s Effectiveness

One of the main arguments against studying abroad is that most colleges lack reasoning behind their promotion of programs. In addition, “aside from anecdotes, the industry has little proof that its programs are accomplishing the lofty goals of global understanding, language proficiency, and good will.”⁶ Putting students into these overseas scenarios is a great way to promote global competency, but there is no definite way to see if this is actually happening. There are no guarantees that every single student will become an actively engaged citizen, knowledgeable in all foreign affairs and issues, and that the United States will become an essential part of worldwide globalization. The issue lies in the fact that there is no way to measure progression or accomplishment. Harry R. Lewis, a computer science professor at Harvard, is adamant towards the superfluous nature of study abroad programs. He said, “We think it’s important for

sociology majors to learn about issues of race and class, but we don't say that can only be done by making them live in slums for a semester.”

Unequal Opportunities for Minorities

Underrepresentation in study abroad programs is a tenacious problem that has remained steadfast over the last decade. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics*, the percent distribution of race/ethnicity in U.S. study abroad participants has been essentially the same since 1999/2000 to 2008/2009, even though the number of participants has increased dramatically.⁷ Caucasian students have been a dominant majority every year; the mean is 82.81%⁷ with a standard deviation of 1.059. African Americans, Asians (Pacific Islanders), Hispanics (Latinos), and various other minority groups struggle to make a dent in the overall quantity of participants, “despite diversity and inclusion interventions, [and] efforts to diversify the international education travel population...”⁸ Determining the causality of this trend is difficult, per se, however some contributing factors are the way in which programs are structured, the lack of faculty encouragement or guidance, costs of programs, language requirements, length of study, fear of racism, and lack of family support. To be the first out of ones friends or family to leave a country, or to fly across the world to live in a foreign place is terrifying for many. This fear or apprehension is sometimes enough to steer minorities clear from the path of study abroad programs.

Underrepresentation of Certain Fields of Study

In a 2008/2009 study conducted by the *Institute of International Education*,⁹ researchers found there to be an overwhelming imbalance in the fields of study for which students were going abroad. The top three fields in order are as follows: 20.7% Social Sciences, 19.5% Business/Management, and 12.3% Humanities. These three subjects comprise 52.5% of all students who study abroad. On the other end of the spectrum, the bottom three fields were: 3.2% Engineering, 1.6% Math/Computer Science, and 1.1% Agriculture. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses have been largely undermined and overlooked by program creators. The credits from these courses do not always transfer, which hinders the participation of even more students in courses overseas. Similarly, as globalization grows and technology advances, the need for internationally literate workers will inflate.

Skyrocketing Costs of Study Abroad Programs

Many colleges and universities advertise their study abroad programs to be essentially the same cost as a regular semester; however, it truly varies from school to school. For example, Wheaton College includes the cost of full tuition, and room and board when charging students for abroad programs; other colleges exclude room and board, or even have students pay for programs directly.¹¹ Regardless of how the costs are broken down, students are unhappy that they are forced to pay close to the full amount per semester. Jennifer Bombasaro-Brady, a student at Wheaton College, claimed, “it doesn't seem right that I was living in a place with no heat, no hot water, no electricity, no Internet, and paying the cost of my dorm room.”¹¹ She studied abroad in South Africa, and filed a lawsuit against the college, alleging that the cost should have been close to \$5,000 cheaper, and that their policy of “pocketing the difference...was a deceptive practice.” The issue was tabled, but because of Bombasaro-Brady's case there has been an extensive investigation on the financial pricing decisions of educational institutions.

Costs are a debilitating factor in the nations attempts at bolstering study abroad

programs, yet there has been a steady increase in the number of participants involved in overseas programs. The graph below illustrates how study abroad participation has increased unprecedentedly from 1999 to 2009. Over that 10 year span the number jumped from 143,590 to 260,327¹⁰ — an increase of approximately 81%. However, students that study abroad only “constitute a mere 1 percent of all students attending U.S. colleges and universities”.³



**Number of United States Study Abroad Participants from 1999-2009*

Adjustments Being Made to Address Issues Within Study Abroad Programs

Outreach Programs

The issue of underrepresented minority groups has been targeted for major change. The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) conducted a study to attain recommendations to tackle the problem, some of which include “creating special outreach groups on college campuses,” and utilizing “creative marketing that targets these populations and showcases the value of international experiences.” People also proposed programs should be “focusing on students at colleges and universities that serve high populations,” and “gathering case studies illustrating the successful implementation of students from these populations in study abroad and other international education programs...”.⁸ If these proposals are implemented there is a good probability that minority groups will feel more comfortable and inclined to participate.

Shorter Trips

There is hope for students who fervently wish to study abroad, but are hampered by its financial burden and time commitment. As seen in a national survey carried out by the *Institute of International Education* in 2008/2009, 56.3% of students chose to study abroad for a short-term (eight weeks or less, summer, or January term), while 41.1% of students preferred to study for a mid-length period of time (one semester/one or two

quarters), and only 4.3% chose to study a long-term (academic/calendar year).⁹ Schools are making it possible for students to travel abroad by “fashioning trips that can be taken during winter or summer breaks, such shorter trips also place a smaller financial burden on students”.¹⁰

Travelling to Developing Nations

The top ten destinations for U.S. students studying abroad from 2000-2010 have been fairly consistent: the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and France have generally ranked highest.¹² However, these programs are also highly expensive due to the industrialization of the above locations. Fortunately, schools are encouraging more students to travel to developing nations so that they can get an equally unique experience for a fraction of the cost. Because of “political changes in Eastern Europe (Russia and Soviet Republics),” “social changes in Africa (Kenya), Asia, and Latin America,” and recent “economic and trade changes in Japan,” there have been advancements in the way programs are developed, which consequently has fed students’ interests.¹³ Also, many students who wish to study French are seen going towards smaller French-speaking regions such as Senegal or Quebec, rather than staying in France in order to save money. As a whole, students are “increasingly choosing shorter programs (46%), less expensive programs (45%), and programs in which their financial aid can be used (43%), as well as programs going to less expensive world regions (33%)”.¹⁴ This trend indicates that there is a high likelihood that more students will choose to travel to non-traditional destinations.

Collegiate Attempts to Adapt to Globalization and Promote Study Abroad

Nations around the world are unified in some way due to politics, and economics. This is irrefutable; in fact, “Globalization is increasingly apparent in our daily lives in the United States, in the food we buy, ownership of the companies for which we work, and the price we pay for gasoline...[but] most colleges and universities have been slow to respond to the effects of globalization.”¹⁵ Educational institutions in the United States have failed to effectively incorporate languages and international culture into courses, thusly adding to the incompetency of American graduates and citizens. But, in a Fall 2010 survey, many campuses stated they were taking “steps such as forming new international partnerships to enable more students to have overseas experiences, and that they were not seeing as many cuts to their study abroad budgets and staffing as they had in 2008/09, immediately following the economic crisis of 2007.”¹⁰ This, as well as other modifications within the structures of study abroad programs, has the potential to improve opportunities for racially and economically disadvantaged students.

Federal Policies Aimed at Promoting Study Abroad

In addition to the Senates 2006 resolution, initiatives such as the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Act have been introduced. Senator Simon had a vision of spreading the popularity of study abroad programs as a means to increase America’s “responsiveness to the rest of the world.”¹⁶ His vision was intertwined with the advice stated in the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program¹⁷ – to create a program that will “require institutions to collaborate in ways that leverage both knowledge and resources to incentivize changes that increase access to study abroad for U.S. students.”¹⁶ All in all, the goal of legislation is to have approximately one million

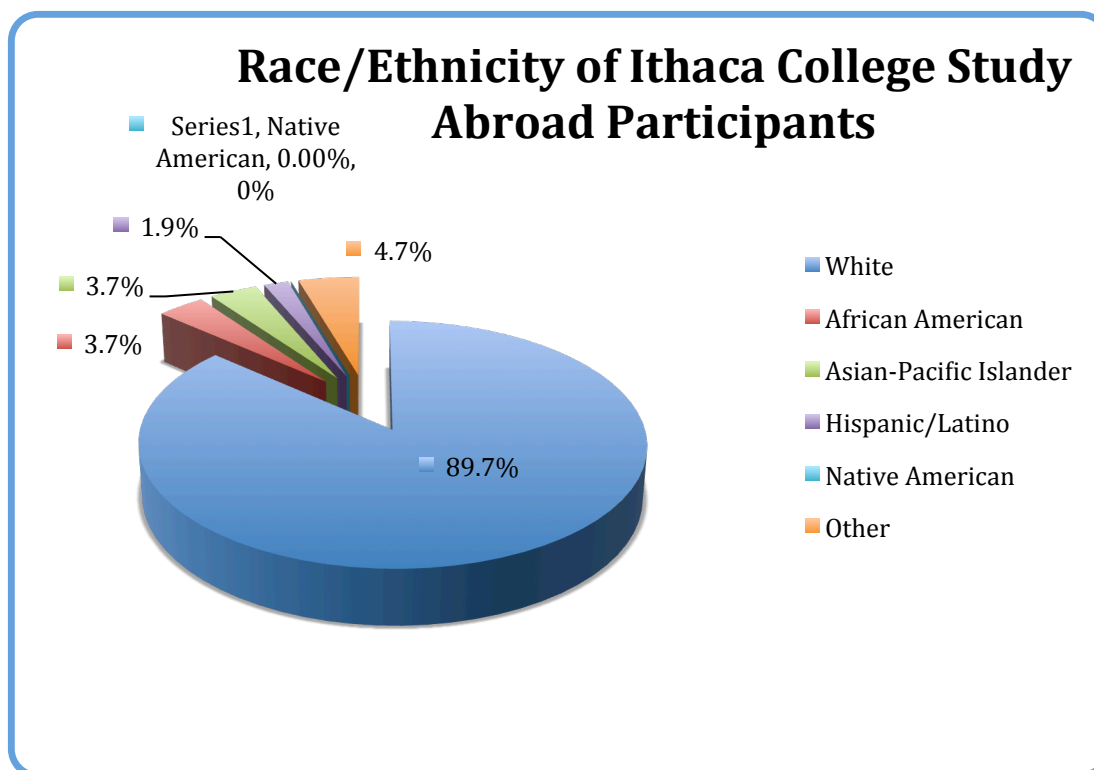
U.S. students studying abroad every year for the next ten years to encourage ethnic diversity within study abroad participation, to broaden destinations in non-traditional countries, and to promote a greater commitment by educational institutions to expand their study abroad opportunities. Also, to approach the issue of evaluating the efficacy of study abroad programs, professionals created an independent organization called the Forum on Education Abroad. This organization “act[s] as an arbiter of standards...it has focused on identifying reputable programs [through] surveys and research, [and] the group [has] devised a set of standards for judging programs.”¹⁶ With programs like these, study abroad activities and curricula can become infinitely more effective and proactive in reaching the universal goal of global acceptance and competence.

Collecting Quantitative Data: Online Databases and Survey

All quantitative information was garnered from an online survey, and through online databases. Academic articles were used to collect information regarding both positive and negative spectrums of study abroad programs — EBSCO Host and ProQuest were activated through the Ithaca College library database, and served as the main sources of articles. For nationwide statistical information, online websites such as *Open Doors: Institute of International Education* and *NAFSA: Association of International Educators* were utilized. The online survey was created through *Survey Monkey* and was produced to gather local information about students who have studied abroad through Ithaca College.

The survey sample was non-random, and chosen purposively for the objective of collecting data exclusively from Ithaca College students who have been involved in a study abroad program. In doing so, the information that was gathered from the survey included quantitative data regarding demographics. These students have a first-hand account of their encounters with foreign peoples and places; they provide insight on the details and inner workings of programs abroad, and expose the good and bad elements of studying abroad in ways that brochures simply cannot.

The survey consisted of 20 questions, five of which pertained to demographics. Out of 107 respondents (study abroad alumni), 83.2% were female and 17.8% were male. * Comparatively, a nationwide statistic shows approximately 65% of participants were female and 36% were male¹⁸ — this trend is analogous to both statistics, and shows the predominance of women in such programs. As aforementioned, the distribution of ethnicity in study abroad programs is greatly disproportional. The graph below illustrates that White students at Ithaca College are approximately 89.7%* of all participants. Additionally, 97.2% of those surveyed are U.S. born citizens, and 53.3% speak a foreign language.



**Note that percentage for ethnicity does not add up to 100, because students were allowed to “check” more than one ethnicity on the survey. Also, the percentage of male to female participants adds to 101% due to unknown reasoning on behalf of respondents.*

Collecting Qualitative Data

Personal Interviews and Online Survey

The survey also gathered qualitative information regarding participants’ experiences, feelings, and opinions on global issues. An astonishing 100% of students surveyed believed it to be important to learn about new cultures and languages; 48.6% responded “yes,” that they followed international news and issues, while an additional 49.5% answered “sometimes.” Similarly, there was an overwhelming majority of students who believed studying abroad would elicit greater career opportunities in their future, in addition to having a greater appreciation for their own culture after living and experiencing a foreign one for an extended period of time.

Interviews were conducted to capture the intimate stories and accounts of students who have studied abroad. It was necessary to have people who had personally experienced another country’s culture; they needed to have the beneficial enrichment of such an experience, but also needed to have faced the demanding obstacles that came with it. The method with which the interviewees were chosen was non-random, but unlike the survey, all of these subjects were volunteers. The interviews were moderately scheduled; all of the questions were held constant for each subject; however, additional questions were explored in order to probe for more information. Furthermore, the interviews were done one-on-one, and were tape recorded in order to pick out memorable or noteworthy quotes verbatim at a later time. The anecdotes collected from all of the interviews paint a vivid picture of how study abroad programs changed the lives of

students, and illustrate just how integral a part they play in creating students' global perspectives.

Qualitative Information from Interviews

Education and Internships

There is much debate regarding the quality of courses in study abroad programs, however, for many students this is not a concern. When asked about this, student Erica Enders responded, "Classes aren't challenging, I hate to say it... take fun classes... you're not going to study, you're going to travel and to grow."²¹ Students are less preoccupied with the content of their courses, and this is seen in the structure of classes. Students only have school from Monday to Thursday; programs are designed to encourage travel. Despite this, all of the interviewees regarded their professors as being well qualified, and the courses to be educational in a completely new way; Marissa Panfel said, "Everything is [about] seeing it and experiencing it, rather than reading or writing about it."²² The subject also recalled that for a Victorian Art class students went to art exhibits and museums, and for a Sport Management class students were allowed to go to the site of the summer 2012 Olympics.

Internships, as well, are a major perk for students studying abroad; it is a glimpse at what a future job might entail. Carter Raines interned at the International Office of Major League Baseball in London, and confessed, "Out of all sports, baseball is probably my least favorite, but I can't complain about it, because I know so many people would give an arm and a leg for that internship. It was a great experience."²² Enders had quite a different experience during her stay in London. She worked at an Entertainment Company where she was involved in gifting lounges for award shows; she would set up backstage and celebrities would come through to pick up free merchandise. She said, "It was cool, but it didn't really fit with my beliefs... I don't believe in celebrities getting free stuff... if you have money you should pay, it should be people who are less unfortunate that should get free stuff."²⁰ Working with renowned people, and learning the ropes of a successful organization's inner workings allows for a student to smoothly segue into a professional work field as opposed to going into it blindly with no background experience.

Food

Cultural differences go further than variations in "language, appearances, and personal habits... culture reflects very deep perceptions, beliefs, and values,"¹⁹ which is at the core of every human being. Being submerged and surrounded by a new way of life pushes students to become more adventurous in their endeavors, especially with food. Carter Raines said with a nostalgic grin, "I've never had Indian food before, but it was so good—we had the spiciest kind, and they were making fun of us, because the girls were sweating, but I was loving it."²² However, some of his experiments did not fare so well; he claimed, "One of my goals was to not eat American food—the weirdest food I had was in Paris. It smelt really bad, it could have been goat testicles; I'm really not sure, they wouldn't tell me." Some students, on the other hand, tend to stick close to familiar foods they know they like. For example, Marissa Panfel remarked, "The food [in Italy] is unbelievable! We were there for three days, and we had gelato nine times."²² Food seems to be an inconsequential aspect of studying abroad, but it truly introduces students to the lifestyles of native peoples; they get the opportunity to try different drinks or meals that

are trademarks of certain countries, and that is something one can only experience outside of the United States.

Exotic Places and Excursions

One of the main reasons students choose to study abroad is for the purpose of travelling; having the ability to explore neighboring regions is a bonus that is unmatched. Vitullo spent her spring break on a surf-trip in Morocco, and described the country as looking like “scenes out of Aladdin;²³ there’s open markets and people wearing burqas.”²⁴ And, while studying in Spain a native friend showed her all of the best local sights on his moped. What is so thrilling about living somewhere outside of ones own country and comfort zone is that everything is brand new, and fascinatingly bizarre. Raines says, “Amsterdam wasn’t the real world. There were urinals on the sidewalks, or you would be sitting at a bar eating, and a cat would jump on your lap.”²²

Language Barriers and Dangers

There are major drawbacks students face when entering an unfamiliar place; they become the foreigners, and native peoples do not always welcome Americans with open arms. While travelling through Spain, Enders recalled, “They [Spaniards] know you’re American, so they are not going to speak English to you, even though they can.”²⁰ Also, Spain is notoriously known for pick pocketing, something Enders and Vitullo quickly learned was not just a myth; both girls noted that they would carry satchels (purses) across their chests, and under their jackets to avoid drawing any attention from pickpocketers. This culture shock, is a major obstacle American students may encounter.²⁵ Vitullo felt this way, especially while travelling through Northern Africa; she said, “I look super American, I have blonde hair and freckles, so I felt so vulnerable when I was in Morocco, because in America you are brought up to feel threatened by Muslims.”²⁴ This vulnerability, however, quickly subsided as she gained an appreciation for the people of Morocco.

Motivation to Study Abroad, and Acquiring Newfound Cultural Perspective

In America, people are habitually trained to be wary of “different” people, because of racial prejudices and fear of terrorism, but this trepidation is usually unnecessary; there is smoke, but no fire. In light of this, Vitullo congruently states, “The longer I stayed there [Morocco] the more I realized that people are just people no matter where you go; the world is not how it is portrayed by the media, it is much smaller than you think it is.”²⁴ Her time abroad was centered on the desire to be culturally immersed and joyously lost in the newness of her surroundings. She said, “It was a catharsis experience, I was looking for the answer to something, but I didn’t know what; it was me wanting to branch off to learn something about myself and European culture.” The motivation that drives one to study abroad is insignificant; it does not matter if one goes to experience a culture shock or goes with the goal of working abroad in the future, because the outcome is all that really matters. Enders confessed, “I have never been so happy in one place; the day I left I went to my favorite statue, the Prince Albert statue. I sat there and just sobbed... I loved that place so much.”²⁰ People who go abroad attach precious memories to places, memories that have caused them to mature, and to grow in the most unexpected ways.

Personal Growth

Many who live and study abroad find latent strengths within themselves, and discover new directions that lives may take. Looking back, Panfel said, “I’ve become so much more focused on what I want to do personally, I’ve become so much more

motivated, and I almost wish I had gone earlier so I had that attitude for more of my college career.”²¹ Dreaming of travelling thousands of miles across the world is usually an unlikely fantasy for most, but there is nothing more surreal than achieving something so seemingly impossible. According to Vitullo, “You have to choose to put yourself in situations as uncomfortable as they may be, because you end up with so much more...if you just stay with your friends and don’t break from your routine you will only come back with empty pockets and a closed mind.”²⁴ Study abroad programs offer more than just education — it is a once in a lifetime opportunity to interact with indigenous people, explore some of the most infamous places, and grow as an individual.

Data Analysis

The findings from online research revealed positive and negative characteristics of study abroad programs. By evaluating the severity of the negative components, there is strong evidence that the consequences of programs are not too detrimental. Underrepresentation, unequal opportunities, costs, and personal qualms regarding participation are all currently being dealt with in some way or another, like the aforesaid federal laws, and programs constructed by local colleges and universities. Costs will continue to be an ongoing problem with studying abroad, because as time progresses there will be more advanced programs that will entail more travelling and intricate curricula. Currently the *Institute of International Education*⁹ is collaborating with educators around the nation to tackle the issue of underrepresentation, and promoting study in places of rising strategic importance to the United States. The Institute is also administering programs such as the Gilman International Scholarship Program, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program and the National Security Education Program Boren Scholarship, in addition to online resources such as IIEPassport.org and StudyAbroadFunding.org to aid students’ financial burdens.

Major obstacles are being diminished year-by-year as more recommendations and solutions are made by small educational institutions and by large, federal ones. These problems cannot be solved over a few years; in fact, change may not even be seen in a decade, because of the unswerving nature of trends thus far. However, with this being said, there is hope for Americans to become tolerant and compliant of different cultures. There is a tendency to think that the United States is its own powerful entity in this world, but in reality all nations are interconnected in some way by means of interaction for economic gain or betterment.

Likewise, what can be inferred from the results extracted from personally conducted research is that study abroad programs have undeniable benefits for the students at Ithaca College who participate in them; the positives overall outweigh the negatives. Most, if not all, students speak highly of their experiences and journeys, and very few harp on the negative aspects of study abroad programs, because they see their time abroad as a gratifying experience that will produce future opportunities. The cultural immersion brought about personal growth and revelation for every student who was interviewed, and this is likely for every American student who is learning and living in a foreign country. The surveys and interviews prove to be a large indicator that study abroad programs are successful in fostering a newfound appreciation for other cultures in students. Also, students are becoming more apt to be informed and educated in foreign

matters; interest in international news and issues is on the rise, and this may in part be due to study abroad programs.

Conclusions

The world is constantly changing; how it is today is infinitely different than how it was 20 years ago. New technology and information has bonded together nations in ways that would have seemed unfathomable in the past. But because of political, economic, and sociocultural differences, there are major barriers that splinter any chance of worldwide understanding and unity we have started to build. One of the United States' primary concerns is to have leaders that are intellectually able to rule collaboratively with leaders of foreign regions in order to stay globally engaged, because this world is shaped by every surrounding nation.

September 11, 2001 emphasized just how vital it is to have a deep understanding of differing peoples' cultures. It is not to say that study abroad programs will wipe away all terrorism and prejudices, because there will always be some level of negativity and intolerance. With this being said, study abroad programs should not be turned away, or regarded as a luxury for upper class white citizens. The United States desperately needs a way to connect to foreign countries, a way that is nonthreatening and non-imperialistic. American ideals have been pushed onto others for far too long — it is time for Americans to listen, and to reflect upon cultures that are dissimilar to their own in order to truly grasp how others think and live.

Study abroad programs can be the key to achieving cross-cultural open-mindedness, because they are annually evolving in order to adapt to changes in global networks and communications. One's own perception of what a "foreigner" is might change if they become the "foreigner" in another person's land – to step out of one's own perspective and to judge something for how it is may be unfeasible, but study abroad programs have the potential to blur the line between what is possible and impossible.

If universal understanding is obtained, then fewer attempts will be made to try and change "inferior" countries to be more Americanized. After all, what makes America so much better than the rest of the world? This nation appears to be powerful on the outside, but internally there are fractures and breaks in society's infrastructure. All hope lies in future generations; with any luck they will learn to respect and value people's differences so that the world is void of war and prejudice. People do not need to forget or purge themselves of their moral beliefs and customs, they merely need to acknowledge that there are other cultures outside of their own that are just as valuable.

In the United States, citizens are brought up to see any person who is different as a threat; Americans are trained to be afraid, narrow-minded, and prejudiced of people within their *own* country (e.g. African Americans, Hispanic). How is it possible for citizens to become understanding of those living in Zimbabwe or Scandinavia when they cannot even be civil with people that live within the same borders? There is too much discrimination in the world. People hate each other for no rhyme or reason; it is all in vain. Thus, it is going to be a long and tedious process for global competence to reach a high point in American citizens. But with the help of abroad programs, it can be accomplished. There is hope for a world that is fueled less by rage and war, and more by unity and compassion.

Endnotes

- ¹ In 2006, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed the Senate resolution 308 appointing the aforementioned year as “The Year of Study Abroad.” It acknowledges the role study abroad plays in shaping American education and global leadership.
 “Why the U.S. Senate Thinks Study Abroad Is a Good Idea.” *World Languages & Cultures - Learn Languages - Know Cultures - Visit Vistawide*. 2011. Web. 8 Mar. 2011.
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- ² *NAFSA*: Association of International Educators is an organization dedicated to international education. This particular article is a report of the strategic task force on education abroad.
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- ³ Mark Ashwill is the Director of the World Languages Program, a Fulbright Program adviser and instructor in the General Education Program at Institute at the State University of Buffalo, New York. He is also founder and executive director of the U.S. Indochina Educational Foundation, Inc.
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- ⁴ Janet Hulstrand is an editor, educator, and writer in Silver Spring, Maryland. She teaches literature courses for Queens College in Paris and Hawaii, where her students learn through a hands-on approach. Hulstrand also trains faculty members in creating safe abroad programs for the City University of New York. Helen Gaudette (Director of College Preparatory Programs at Queens College) is quoted in this article.
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- ⁵ *RAND* (Research and Development) is a nonprofit global policy that was created to provide research and analysis to the U.S. armed forces by Douglas Aircraft Company. Biksen, Tora K., Gregory F. Treverton, Joy Moini, and Gustav Lindstrom. “New Challenges for International Leadership: Lessons from Organizations with Global Missions.” *RAND*. RAND, 2003. Web. 3 Apr. 2011.
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- ⁷ The *National Center for Education Statistics* is the main federal unit that collects and analyzes education related data.
- "Number of U.S. Students Studying Abroad and Percentage Distribution, by Sex, Race/ethnicity, Academic Level, Host Region, and Duration of Stay: 1996–97 through 2006–07." *National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education*. Web. 3 Apr. 2011. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_225.asp>.
- ⁸ McLellan, Carlton E. "International Education Travel and Youth of Color: College Is Too Late!" *ProQuest*. Education and Urban Society, Mar. 2011. Web. 2 Apr. 2011. <<http://ezproxy.ithaca.edu:2086/pqdweb?index=0&did=2267790101&SrchMode=2&sid=1&Fmt=2&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1301527027&clientId=12342>>.
- ⁹ The *Institute of International Education* was established in 1919 by Nobel Peace Prize winners Nicholas Murray Butler, Elihu Root, and Stephen Duggan; they believed our nation could not “Achieve lasting piece without greater understanding between nations – and that international educational exchange formed the strongest basis for fostering such understanding.”
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¹⁷ The Lincoln Commission recommended that by 2016 one million students should have participated in study abroad programs; in sight of this, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill approving \$80 million annually towards achieving that goal.

¹⁸ Vistawide offers free information and resources regarding foreign languages and cultures.

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World Languages & Cultures - Learn Languages - Know Cultures - Visit Vistawide. Web. 3 Apr. 2011.

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¹⁹ "Why Study Abroad? 10 Reasons Why You Should Study in a Foreign Country."

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<http://www.vistawide.com/studyabroad/why_study_abroad.htm>.

²⁰ Erica Enders face-to-face interview. Senior at Ithaca College, studying Business Administration and Marketing; studied abroad in London in the Spring 2010.

²¹ Marissa Panfel face-to-face interview. Senior at Ithaca College, studying Business Management and Marketing; studied abroad in London in the Spring 2010 semester.

²² Carter Raines face-to-face interview. Junior at Ithaca College, studying Business Administration/International Business and Sports Management; studied abroad in London in the fall 2010 semester.

²³ Aladdin was a Disney cartoon/movie created in 1992. Its storyline was centered around the marketplace of a made-up kingdom called "Agrabah," which is modeled after various Arabian countries.

²⁴ Amanda Vitullo face-to-face interview. Junior at Ithaca College, studying Integrated Marketing and Communications and minors in Art; studied abroad in Spain in the Spring 2010 semester, and in Los Angeles in the Fall 2010 semester.

²⁵ Culture shock is known as a feeling of vulnerability or helplessness one may experience when they are immersed in a foreign culture.