

STUDENT EXPECTANCY AND BARRIERS TO STUDY ABROAD

Alex Vernon, Missouri Southern State University
Chris Moos , Missouri Southern State University
Holly Loncarich, Missouri Southern State University

ABSTRACT

The need for business schools to increase student interest in international study experiences is well established. Business leaders as well as accreditation bodies are in agreement that it is important that more students have international experience. This paper presents the findings result of a survey of students from a small U.S. university concerning perceptions of barriers to participation in international study experiences and expectancy to participate in international study experiences.

Keywords: Globalization, Internationalization, Study Abroad, Barriers, Study Abroad Intent.

INTRODUCTION

Universities have responded to stakeholder interests of educating and preparing students with a global perspective for careers in today's globalized world. Increasingly greater emphasis is placed on study abroad as a 'high-impact' experiential learning mode as foundation for creating a global perspective (Hackney, Boggs & Borozan, 2012; Schnusenberg, de Jong & Goel, 2012). As a result many U.S. universities now include international education as a requirement to address the global competence priority (Gardner, 2005).

In the 2014-15 academic years nearly 290,000 U.S. students studied abroad, up nearly 150% in 10 years (IIS, 2014; Zhuang, 2015). College freshmen report high levels of intent to study abroad, up to 63%, yet the percent of graduates who study abroad is only 14.3%, representing only about 1% of all U.S. college students (Pope, 2014; IIS, 2014, Zhuang, 2015). Clearly there is a serious disconnect between freshman intent and degree completion students actual participation. There has been significant research into the entering student attitudes toward study abroad and barriers to student participation later in students' academic careers. This paper examines the relationship between intent to study abroad and some of the previously researched barriers to study abroad.

Study Abroad Intent

Student attitudes towards study abroad has a rich history of research with studies finding that women are more likely to declare an intent, show a willingness and actually participate in study abroad (Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Stroud, 2010; Hackney, Boggs & Borozan, 2012). Kim and Goldstein (2005) found that this increased intent, interest and participation was related to women being less ethnocentric, more open-minded and less intercultural communication apprehensive. Miller (2008) found that students whose parents had earned a university degree

had higher participation levels in study abroad. Parents are an obvious influencer on student's choices in higher education, from the desire to earn a degree, university choice and field of study to co-curricular activities.

Many studies have found that household income influences student's participation in study abroad (Dessoff, 2006). Study abroad presents an additional cost to the already high cost of higher education and may act to increase student loan debt for many students. Business students believe that study abroad is expensive and want grants to help with the cost (Presley et al., 2010). The relationship between household income and intent to study abroad has had mixed results in research. Contrary to previous research, Stroud (2010) found that household income had no correlation with intent to study abroad, while Salisbury et al. (2010) found that low-income women were less inclined to study abroad while no such relationship existed for men. While it is unclear whether household income affects the intent to study abroad, studies have found that low income students are underrepresented in actual participation (Relyea, Cocchiara & Stoddard, 2008).

Study Abroad Barriers

Dessoff (2006) cites institutional barriers to explain why most of the 1% of U.S. students studying abroad is skewed towards more well-off institutions and students. Gordon (2014) cites financial concerns as the number one barrier to student participation in terms of not only the direct cost of study abroad but also the opportunity cost (of lost wages) which can be significant for commuter students. Other barriers include lack of family and or friends support, administrative and academic barriers and finally low levels of internationalized professors. (Gordon, 2014; Kowk & Arpan, 2002). Hackney, Boggs and Borozan (2012) found the business student willingness to study abroad was influenced by personal, location and situational variables and further that completing an international business class had no effect.

Pope (2014) proposed that today's students' desire for individual growth is a critical motivational factor for study abroad intent and that the individual growth motivation was further moderated by gender, parents' educational level, prior international experience, age and household income. Fitzsimmons, Flanagan and Wang (2013) found that financial constraints, employment status, relationship status and pressure to graduate were all factors which serve to create this disconnect between intent to study abroad and actual participation. Zauberman and Lynch (2005) postulated that the intent to participation decline is due to a time lag effect. Students and people in general, will often state an intention in the distant future assuming that by that future date the time and resources to carry out the intention will be available. For college freshman the idea of an international trip or study abroad is a future intention that academics, finances, family, employment and other factors in the two to three year time between the freshman and junior or senior year interfere.

Gordon (2014) investigated 9 barriers in a comparison of U.S. and European students as reported by study abroad coordinators and counsellors. Study Abroad coordinators and counsellors reported higher U.S. student concerns for barriers of finances, family, friends, career relevance, university support and course availability, but lower concerns for fear, destination and grade conversion (Gordon, 2014). Goldstein and Kim (2006) found that non-study abroad students expressed significantly higher concerns for completing the chosen major, but no differences between participating and non-participating students in terms of intolerance of

ambiguity, travel experience, graduating on time, future employer's perceptions, income, race/ethnicity or major.

METHOD

A survey was developed and administered to 155 undergraduate students enrolled at moderately selective, medium sized public university during the 2015-2016 academic years. Participation was voluntary.

The survey was composed of questions aimed to assess student intent to participate in international study opportunities and likely barriers to participation. Seven point Likert-scaled items were written to assess student perception of the importance of barriers to participation in an international study program. This choice allows for data that are more easily and richly analysed than the ranking method used in the Magellen Survey (2012). The International Study Expectancy Scale (ISES) (Goldstein and Kim, 2006) was used to measure intent to participate in a study abroad experience.

Goldstein and Kim (2006) developed the International Study Expectancy Scale (ISES) to assess student attitudes and concerns about study abroad, specifically addressing expectations in relations to social and personal development domains. ISES Consists of 10 Likert-type items and resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80. Questions regarding barriers to study abroad were constructed based on the 9 barriers cited in Gordon's (2014) study of study abroad coordinators and counsellors.

SAMPLE

The sample in this study consisted of a convenience sample of $n=155$ undergraduate students. The participants had a median age of 21 and only four students over the age of 30. 51% were male (49% female) and almost 90% reported no spouse or dependents. Approximately 52% indicate that they have travelled to another country. However, students studying business represented a disproportionate amount of the sample size. 72.3% were enrolled in the School of Business and Technology, 9.7% in School of Arts and Sciences, 5.8% in School of Education and Psychology, 3.9% in School of Health Sciences and 8.3% in other majors. Median semester hours completed was 78 (Q1=42, Q3=103) indicating that the majority of the students were at least halfway through their second year of college.

ASSUMPTIONS

The main assumptions of the study were: (a) the responses were in fact those of the participants; (b) the data were the actual needs of the participants; and (c) the surveys were completed independently by each participant. It was also assumed that the participants answered honestly.

LIMITATIONS

The study had several limitations. The interpretations of the survey questions may have affected the participants' responses. The environment in which the participants completed the survey also may have interfered with the level of concentration exhibited by each respondent.

The participants may have answered according to how they would like to be compared to how they actually felt about certain survey statements.

DELIMITATIONS

This study was delimited to students at one institution and therefore restricted to a relatively low number of participants. Data were collected using a survey instrument with a Likert-type scale with limited open-ended response items.

DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire was a 44-item instrument that took most students less than 20 min to complete. The survey consisted of closed-end questions, Likert-type items and a few open-ended demographic questions (e.g. “What is your age based on your last birthday?”). The items were designed to elicit information about demographics, intent and barriers to participation in international study abroad experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section contains a counts and percentages for each response category for the questions concerning barriers to student participation in international study abroad experiences and analysis of Pearson correlations between the barriers and ISES scale which measures intent to study abroad.

Frequency Analysis

Frequency and percentage of responses by category are shown in Table 1. Monetary barriers appear to greatly impact student’s ability or to study abroad. Costs, both in the costs associated with international travel and the costs of lost wages appear to have a significant impact on whether or not students decide to study abroad. The cost of international study and lost wages barrier items have similar response profiles with more than 35% of the responses in the “agree” and “strongly agree” categories and more than 55% in the “somewhat agree”, “agree” and “strongly agree” categories. The “getting time off from work” barrier is not greatly different.

However, students are likely to be more interested in studying abroad if the financial burden is decreased. Approximately 78% of the respondents (“somewhat agree”, “agree” and “strongly agree”) indicate that they would be more interested if the university provides financial support. This factor is likely to significantly influence student’s decisions to study abroad with 61% of the responses to this item reported in the “agree” and “strongly agree” category. Similarly almost 81% of the respondents at least “somewhat agree” that they are impressed with the variety of international experiences offered by MSSU.

Safety concerns are another factor that impacts the interest level of studying abroad. About one third (32.9%) of the respondents at least “somewhat agree” that they would be concerned about their personal safety. However, student’s families appear to influence this safety factor even more. Almost 68% of survey respondents at least “somewhat agree” that their family would be concerned about their safety.

Finally, student’s concerns about academic success and social needs may also influence the decision to study abroad. Approximately 17% of the respondents at least “somewhat agree”

that an international experience would result in a lower GPA. Students are also concerned about travel companions. Close to 72% of respondents at least “somewhat agree” that they would be more apt to participate in an international experience if friends or acquaintances participate in the study abroad program as well.

Table 1
RESPONSES TO BARRIER QUESTION

Barrier (Abbreviation)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree	Agree, Strongly Agree
Cost of International Study (Cost)	6	21	15	17	33	41	22	155	96	63
	3.87%	13.55%	9.68%	10.97%	21.29%	26.45%	14.19%		61.94%	40.65%
Lost wages from current job (Wages)	9	24	10	26	31	35	20	155	86	55
	5.81%	15.48%	6.45%	16.77%	20%	22.58%	12.90%		55.48%	35.48%
More Interested if University provides financial support (usupp)	2	6	9	17	26	47	48	155	121	95
	1.29%	3.87%	5.81%	10.97%	16.77%	30.32%	30.97%		78.06%	61.29%
Concerned for personal safety(SafePer)	25	36	18	25	35	10	6	155	51	16
	16.13%	23.23%	11.61%	16.13%	22.58%	6.45%	3.87%		32.90%	10.32%
Family concern for my safety (SafeFarm)	8	13	14	15	44	31	30	155	105	61
	5.16%	8.39%	9.03%	9.68%	28.39%	20.00%	19.35%		67.74%	39.35%
I like going on short trips by myself (Short trip)	4	25	20	27	30	33	16	155	79	49
	2.58%	16.13%	12.90%	17.42%	19.35%	21.29%	10.32%		50.97%	31.61%
I am impressed with variety of international experiences available to me at the university (Variety)	0	2	3	25	31	61	33	155	125	94
	0.00%	1.29%	1.94%	16.13%	20.00%	39.35%	21.29%		80.65%	60.65%
I fear that international experience Would lower GPA (GPA)	22	52	27	28	14	10	2	155	26	12
	14.19%	33.55%	17.42%	18.06%	9.03%	6.45%	1.29%		16.77%	7.74%
I Would study abroad if I could go with people I know(people)	2	8	6	28	37	48	26	155	111	74
	1.29%	5.16%	3.87%	18.06%	23.87%	30.97%	16.77%		71.61%	47.74%
Getting time off work is a Significant barrier to participation in international study (Time Work)	8	25	9	25	28	34	26	155	88	60
	5.16%	16.13%	5.81%	16.13%	18.06%	21.06%	21.94%			38.71%
Family responsibility is a significant barrier to participation in international study (Fam Res)	13	29	11	30	27	23	22	155	72	45
	8.39%	18.71%	7.10%	19.35%	17.42%	14.84%	14.19%		46.45%	29.03%

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 contains Pearson correlations between barriers and Intent to Study Abroad (ISES). None of the correlations are strong, though several are statistically significant. A few observations are listed in the following paragraphs.

	Cost	Wages	Usupp	SafePer	SafeFam	Shorttrip	Variety	GPA	People	TimeWrk	FamRes
Wages	0.461										
P-value	0.000										
Usupp	0.100	0.235									
P-values	0.215	0.004									
SafePer	0.168	0.296	0.009								
P-value	0.036	0.000	0.908								
SafeFam	0.225	0.212	-0.030	0.505							
P-value	0.005	0.008	0.711	0.000							
Shorttrip	0.040	-0.041	0.228	-0.277	-0.197						
p-value	0.618	0.608	0.004	0.000	0.014						
Variety	-0.153	-0.122	0.076	-0.012	-0.022	0.031					
p-value	0.058	0.131	0.349	0.883	0.785	0.704					
GPA	0.146	0.127	-0.044	0.385	0.256	-0.196	-0.218				
p-value	0.069	0.114	0.587	0.000	0.001	0.015	0.006				
People	0.034	0.114	0.324	0.226	0.153	-0.143	0.126	0.227			
p-value	0.676	0.159	0.000	0.005	0.058	0.075	0.118	0.005			
TimeWrk	0.366	0.638	0.229	0.118	0.147	0.089	-0.087	0.146	0.152		
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.144	0.068	0.271	0.283	0.070	0.059		
FamRes	0.313	0.409	-0.024	0.315	0.336	-0.072	0.018	0.158	0.099	0.431	
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.766	0.000	0.000	0.374	0.822	0.049	0.222	0.000	
ISES Scale	-0.215	-0.153	0.243	-0.262	-0.171	0.231	0.317	-0.323	0.083	-0.054	-0.162
p-value	0.007	0.058	0.002	0.001	0.034	0.004	0.000	0.000	0.303	0.502	0.044

Correlations between Barriers

There are 10 barrier items which yields 45 pairwise comparisons. More than half of the correlations are significantly different than 0 at the 0.10 level (or higher). As indicated in the survey responses, students are very concerned with the financial impact of studying abroad. The correlation between lost wages and time off from work barriers is the largest single correlation (0.638). It should also be noted that the only other correlation greater than 0.5 is between an individual's concern for their personal safety and their family's concern for their safety (0.505).

Family's concern for safety barrier and concern that international educational experience will affect GPA barrier items are each correlated with eight barrier items. Cost and concern for

personal safety barriers are significantly correlated with seven barrier items. Four other barriers are correlated with six barrier items.

Correlations between Barriers and ISES Scale

Given that there are 11 barrier items, there are 11 pairwise correlations between barriers and ISEES. Nine of these correlations are significant at the 0.10 level with six significant at the 0.01 level of significance. These are listed in descending order by absolute magnitude in the Table 3.

Barrier	Correlation	Correlation	p-value
I fear that international experience would lower my GPA (GPA)	-0.323	0.323	0.000
I am impressed with variety of international experience available to me at the university (Variety)	0.317	0.317	0.000
Concerned for personal safety (Saferper)	-0.262	0.262	0.001
More interested if university provides financial support (Usupp)	0.243	0.243	0.002
I like going on short trips by myself (Shorttrip)	0.231	0.231	0.004
Cost of international study (Cost)	-0.215	0.215	0.007
Family concern for my safety (SafeFam)	-0.171	0.171	0.034
Family responsibilities is a significant barrier to participation in international study (FamRes)	-0.162	0.162	0.044
Lost wages from current job (Wages)	-0.153	0.153	0.058
I would study abroad if I could go with people I know (People)	0.083	0.083	0.303
Getting time off work is a significant barrier to participation in international study (TimeWrk)	-0.054	0.054	0.502

Interest in international travel measured by ISES is positively correlated with more university financial support, liking short trips alone and being positively impressed with MSSU's international experiences. ISES is negatively correlated with concern that an international study experience will negatively impact GPA, personal concern for safety, cost, family concern for safety, family responsibilities and lost wages barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND FURTHER STUDY

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to provide information to help increase international study rates for undergraduate students—particularly business students. Using the information gathered from this study, educational institutions will better understand what impacts a student's decision to study abroad. As one might expect cost of the experience, loss of wages while participating in the international experience and getting time off from work are important barriers to participation. While previous studies of areas such as household income have shown mixed

results, this may be a function of how and which questions are asked (Dessof, 2006; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010; Relyea, Cocchiara & Stoddard, 2008). The students surveyed are clearly more interested in international study if the university provides financial support. Students are likely to see study abroad experiences as a worthwhile investment if they know that their university is investing into the experience as well. Interest in international travel as measured by ISES is significantly correlated with the university providing financial support.

Students are also concerned about visiting countries alone. Most are more interested in an international experience if they can go with people they know. Universities can counteract this by ensuring that ample social interactions and group meetings between the participants are organized before the trip begins so that students do not feel they are traveling with strangers. Finances are a big deal and group experiences are likely to be attractive to students. Barrier statistics and correlational analysis indicates that students aren't so concerned about international experiences negatively affecting their GPA.

Students are not very concerned about their personal safety while participating in an international study experience, but agree that their family would be concerned. Interest in international travel is related to concern for safety. In the current climate, addressing these needs is even more important in order to prevent students from refraining from study abroad due to safety concerns. Addressing concerns for student safety is important for the students and their families. This can be achieved by maintaining open communication and transparency between students and trip organizers and proactively addressing and educating students about safety concerns while studying abroad.

Conclusion and Implications

Studying abroad is considered by many students to be a capstone of the college experience. However, only a small percentage of students study abroad. Although many students intend to study abroad when first entering college, many barriers prevent these students from doing so.

This study identified the most influential barriers to studying abroad and proposed solutions to remedy these barriers. The most significant barriers stem from financial worries, fear of traveling alone, concerns for safety. Financial support for international study experiences is very important to students. University funding to assist with cost is necessary as students are concerned with both the cost of the experience and the opportunity cost of lost wages.

Trip and experience planning and marketing to students and even their families are very important. The experiences must be such that fears of both students and their families are minimized. Group trips are likely to be successful for our students due to the likely reduction in fear and gain in comfort from traveling with people who are not strangers.

By identifying and proactively addressing these concerns, universities will be able to encourage more students to study abroad.

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