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# A Study of U.S. Education Outcomes for Female Students from the Republic of Georgia

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A STUDY OF U.S. EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR FEMALE  
STUDENTS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of therequirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy

Seton Hall University

2014



SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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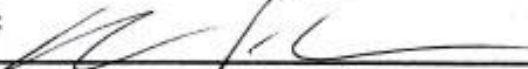
APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, **Nino Bitsadze**, has successfully defended and made the required  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study sought to understand how living and studying in the United States affected the personalities, beliefs, attitudes, and careers of a group of female students from the Republic of Georgia. The researcher traveled to Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, to interview twenty alumni of U.S. study programs (on undergraduate and graduate study levels) individually. Jack Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory and David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provide the theoretical framework for the study.

The findings revealed that living and studying in the U.S. matured the participants personally as they got to experience the challenges that accompany living independently in an unfamiliar environment, which in turn boosted their sense of self and efficacy. Also, the study participants commonly expressed that the U.S. experience taught them to appreciate difference and diversity firsthand, and enabled them to recognize — and then dismiss — stereotypes they had held about people they had never met. They also described the experience of personal interactions with people of different nationalities as eye-opening and invaluable. Living away from their home country naturally brought about changes in the participants' frames of reference by forcing them to critically reflect on their prior knowledge and consciously transform their attitudes and actions. Furthermore, the participants greatly attributed their successful careers to the knowledge and skills gained while studying in the U.S.

**KEYWORDS:** U.S. education outcomes for international students, Georgian students in the U.S., study abroad outcomes

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Nana and Zuri Bitsadze, for all they have given me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the wonderful, awe-inspiring Georgian women who contributed their thought-proving, reflective insights to this research. Your enthusiasm, wisdom, wit, and candor incessantly sent chills down my spine.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In 2011/12, the number of international students in the U.S. increased by 5.7% to a record high of 764,495 students (Institute of International Education, 2012). Contemporary literature on cross-border education contains ample studies which have explored a variety of issues pertaining to the international student population in the U.S. A vast majority of these studies have captured academic, cultural, linguistic, financial, and social challenges that international students experience while transitioning into the U.S. higher education from their home countries. For example, there are studies concerned with the adjustment of foreign students to the American culture and the nature and extent of problems encountered (Furnham, 1988; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000; Berman & Cheng, 2001; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Ward, 2005; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008), sources of stress and anxiety (Surdam & Collins, 1984; Andrade, 2006; Keller, 2009), the factors that hinder and help foreign students' academic adjustment and achievement (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Kaur, 2007; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010), financial problems and lack of understanding from the broader university community (Poyrazli, Grahame & Sumer, 2008; Thomas & Chui, 2010), and discrimination against foreign students, unfairness and inhospitality within the host society (Lee & Rice, 2005).

There are also studies that have examined international students' expressed needs for campus support structures (Briguglio, 2000; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002), utilization patterns of campus resources (Frey & Roysircar, 2006), and international students' satisfaction with existing resources (Shen & Herr, 2004; Wongpaiboon, 2008).

Research supports the common conception that while adjustment to college can be challenging for all students, international students face additional cultural, linguistic, relational, and career-related difficulties while trying to attain their goals (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008;

Olivas & Li, 2006; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). International students sometimes also encounter inconsistencies between their pre-sojourn expectations and the realities of their new homes (Constantine et al., 2005). Moreover, they often struggle with the experience of the loss of social status they enjoyed in their countries of origin and feel the pressure to assimilate to the cultural norms of the dominant society (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Urban, 2012).

The fact of the matter is that despite significant challenges, many international students continue to choose the United States as their destination to pursue higher education because they consider this experience to be their life-long dream (Urban & Orbe, 2007). The decision to study in the United States is primarily driven by students' expectation to improve their future career opportunities and obtain experience that will eventually lead to employment either in the U.S., their home countries, or internationally (Obst and Forster 2007; Chow, 2011, Urban, 2012).

International education is expected to allow students to “experience new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study” (Obst & Forster, 2007, p. 15), get a broader, more flexible, and more practice-oriented education than offered in the home country, develop personally and become more independent, as well as build intercultural friendships and networks (Obst & Forster, 2007).

Although the United States is still perceived as a desirable study-abroad destination, particularly among middle-class international students (McMurtrie, 2011), U.S. higher education continues to experience growing competition from countries such as Great Britain and Australia, where economic and educational conditions have been improving (Alberts, 2007).

While higher education institutions have virtually no control over many of the factors impacting international student mobility such as stringent national visa policies and job market, many institutions recognize the high value of international students on their campuses and are

working toward facilitating international student growth through investments in recruitment and additional staff hired to develop global collaborations (McMurtrie, 2011). Higher education institutions greatly benefit from international students' presence and their cultural, academic, and financial contributions (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). In fact, annually, international students contribute over \$20 billion to the U.S. economy, largely through their tuition and living expenses (Institute of International Education, 2012).

There is indeed great value in the financial contributions of international students. However, we also need to bear in mind that the benefits of international students' presence on U.S. college and university campuses extend far beyond the revenue they generate (Breuning, 2007). The truly invaluable benefit of having a diverse student body is the reciprocal cultural learning and the development of intercultural competencies by all students; intercultural competency has become a prerequisite for all people in order to effectively function in our increasingly globalized societies. Moreover, robust international student presence on U.S. college and university campuses has the potential for the internationalization of the curriculum, the development of networks for future recruitment and international relations, as well as the establishment of global economic and diplomatic relationships (Arthur & Flynn, 2011).

## **Problem Statement**

Although U.S. colleges and universities enroll more international students than any other country in the world (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013), most of what is reported in the literature about their experiences emphasizes the transition challenges they face in adapting to a new, foreign living and learning environment and other issues that occur while they are still studying at the host institutions. The important message that doesn't adequately come through in the contemporary literature is that being exposed to a new way of life in a foreign and challenging environment is not just difficult and intimidating for foreign students; in fact, this experience can be transformative (Kim & Ruben, 1988; Mezirow, 1994; Zhai, 2000; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002; Dolby, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Keefe, 2008, Paige & Fry, 2009; Donahue, 2009).

Some scholars hold that some of the changes in students, who experience studying abroad, may not occur until after they return home (Farrell & Suvedi, 2003; Van Hoof, 2005).

Few studies have addressed international students' experiences related to their preparation for the transition out of higher education into the world of work, either in their home countries or internationally (Arthur, 2008; Leung, 2007; Erichsen, 2009). Nor does much research exist on international students' perceived value that studying in the United States adds to them personally and professionally, their expectations from higher education related to their professional and personal development and future career goals, and the extent to which international students are engaged in their own goal attainment (Urban, 2012, p.9).

Existing literature does contain research on study abroad outcomes. However, these studies almost exclusively have examined study abroad outcomes for American college students. For example, through empirical studies, scholars have provided evidence that studying abroad broadens students' worldviews and global perspectives (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; McCabe,

1994; Kuh, 1995; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002; Patterson, 2006; Keefe, 2008), promotes students' inter-cultural competence (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002, Kitsantas, 2004), boosts students' self reliance, self confidence, reflective thoughts and personal well being (Kuh & Kaufman, 1984; Zhai, 2000, Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Sato, 2009), strongly and positively influences students' career development (Akande & Slawson, 2000; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Fry, 2008), and promotes active and responsible citizenship through civic engagement, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship and volunteerism (Freire, 1997; Paige & Fry, 2009; Donahue, 2009).

What happens to the thousands of foreign students after they return to their home countries? How do they perceive the changes that the U.S. experience may have brought about in their personalities, attitudes, beliefs, and endeavors? How do U.S. study outcomes compare to the ones that American students experience as a result of studying abroad? There is scant research available in this area, and such research is especially limited with respect to the U.S. study graduates from the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU).<sup>1</sup>

While developing a proposal for the present study in May of 2011, I contacted the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) office in Tbilisi, Georgia, which administers many of the U.S. study programs for Georgian citizens.<sup>2</sup> Among these programs are the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (also known as Global UGRAD) and Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program, which send students to the U.S. annually from all former Soviet countries for a study period of one academic year on the undergraduate level and two academic years on the graduate level, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> These types of studies might be harder to uncover due to language limitations of U.S. databases. For example studies conducted in languages other than English would not be showing up in databases or search engines generally utilized such as Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest dissertations database, education research journals such as *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, as well as IIE, OECD, and UNESCO publications.

<sup>2</sup> IREX is a U.S.-based international nonprofit organization administering educational exchange and training programs for local individuals and institutions in Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America.

The IREX staff reaffirmed the lack of current, focused, and interview-based exploratory research on U.S. education outcomes for the Georgian alumni and expressed great interest in the proposed research initiative. In my communications with them, I learned that most of what is known about the impact of U.S. study experiences on the students from the former Soviet countries, including Georgia, is produced through program evaluation projects, not through studies conducted by independent researchers who are not involved in the administration of these programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In an effort to build up knowledge about the outcomes of living and studying in the U.S. for international students, the present study offers the perspectives of a group of female U.S. study graduates from the Republic of Georgia. The purpose of this research was to understand how these students have been affected by their U.S. experiences; More specifically, what changes (if any) have they observed in their personalities, beliefs, attitudes, and careers as a result of living and studying in the U.S.

### **Research Question**

The following overarching question guided the research: *How does living and studying in the United States affect Georgian students' personalities, intercultural competence, level of civic engagement, and career development?*

As is evidenced by the question, I created a framework for the study by laying out four main domains in which I wanted to explore changes. The four domains are: Personal Development, Intercultural Competence, Civic Engagement, and Career Development.

I chose to focus on these four constructs as a) they encompass all major areas of influence that other researchers who have explored study abroad outcomes have reported on, and therefore



we can better understand how Georgian students' experiences compare with those from other countries, and b) they encompass all key areas in which changes would be interesting to explore pertinent to the population at hand, keeping in mind the history, culture, and customary lifestyles in Georgia.

For example, in a Georgian society, which is characterized by collectivism rather than individualism, young adults are not used to living independently, without the support of their families, and often their decisions for dealing with challenges in their lives are based on parents' or other family members' opinions. Hence, a study focused on uncovering how Georgian students have benefited from studying and living in the U.S. in terms of personal development would render considerable findings.

Furthermore, the former Soviet Union used to be a secluded place, and its citizens, fed by the Soviet propaganda, had virtually no exposure to the rest of the world for over 70 years. One would assume that living in such a secluded society would set off stereotypes about the people of other cultures. Additionally, Georgia experienced a harsh oppression of the national identity during the Soviet regime ruled by Russia, and as a way of making up for the damage, the country engaged in an intensive reinstatement of national identity after breaking away from the Union in early 1990s. Given this background, I wanted to discover how the exposure to cultural and religious diversity in the U.S. has affected the Georgian students' ability to function in a multicultural environment.

Civic engagement is also a momentous dimension given the population of the study. With a recent history of authoritarian and corrupt regime in the post-Soviet republics and concurrently in Georgia, the value of an active civil society composed of young, worldly citizens, who understand the duties and responsibilities of the citizens and governments and actively participate in the betterment of their communities cannot be overstated. Thus, I wanted to

uncover and share my research participants' reflections on how their U.S. experiences had shaped their perceptions and attitudes about citizenship, specifically community involvement, which is one of the vital attributes of a democratic civil society.

Lastly, the value of young, broad-minded and trained individuals with a set of skills necessary in today's globalized world cannot be estimated for a transitional economy like Georgia. Switch from a planned, government-controlled economic system to a Western style market economy has created a dire need for new leaders who possess Western-style managerial, organizational, research, and marketing skills, which were practically neglected during the Soviet regime as all enterprises were owned by the central government. Keeping this context in mind, I wanted to bring to light the Georgian graduates' success stories post U.S. experience, and to convey their interpretations of how the professional skills and qualities gained in the U.S. have helped them attain success in their home country after returning from the U.S.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The study is placed in a theoretical context composed of Jack Mezirow's (1994) Transformative Learning Theory and David A. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. These two frameworks serve as a lens to examine the process through which the foreign study experience affects the outcomes in question.

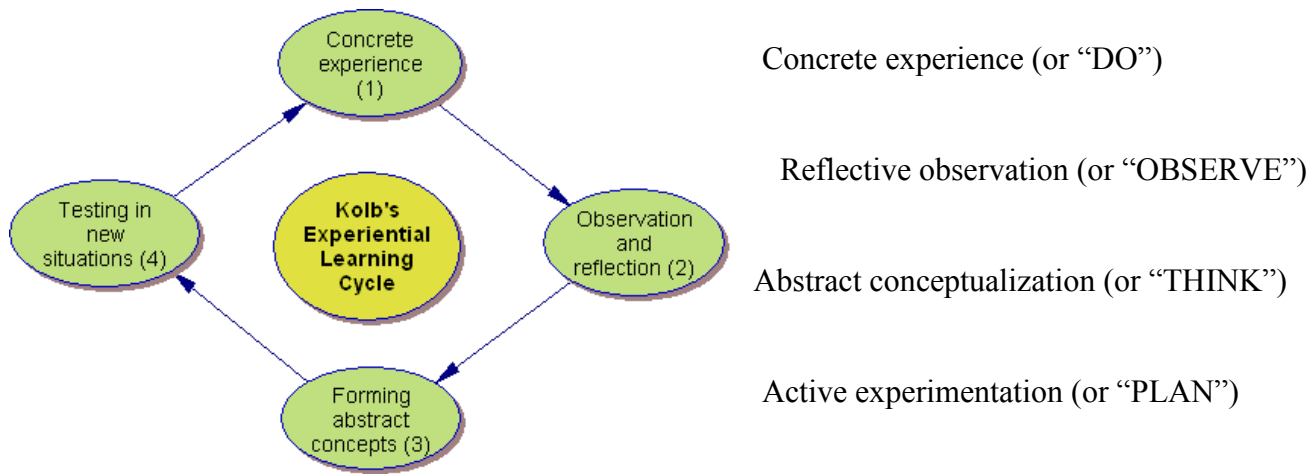
Within Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, "transformative learning" is a term used in educational theory to describe a process which leads the learner to re-evaluate past beliefs and experiences; it refers to the "process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

At the core of the Transformative Learning Theory is the process of "perspective transformation", with three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle). The four domains of U.S. study outcomes discussed above, perfectly fit in these dimensions, with personal development placed in the psychological frame, intercultural competence placed in the convictional frame, and civic engagement and career development placed in the behavioral frame.

Furthermore, transformative learning gains more meaning when it is discussed in light of adult learning. Mezirow (2000) suggests that we make meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding in adulthood, for we more clearly understand our experience when we know under what conditions an expressed ideal is true or justified. He further explains that "interpretations and opinions that may have worked for us as children often do not as adults" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). This component of Mezirow's theory is also pertinent to the proposed study, which involves exploring the perceptions of Georgian students who were educated in the U.S. during adulthood.

In order to delve deeper into the learning process that occurs while studying abroad, I additionally refer to David A. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. Kolb's framework informs us about the process of making meaning from direct experience by presenting a cyclical model of learning, consisting of four stages (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, (Kolb,1984)**



Kolb's four-stage learning cycle shows how experience is translated through reflection into concepts, which in turn are used as guides for active experimentation and the choice of new experiences. To situate the proposed study in this cycle, we would imagine that the first stage, *concrete experience* (CE), is where the learners lived in an American community and studied at an American university. The second stage, *reflective observation* (RO), would be when the students consciously reflect back on that experience. The third stage, *abstract conceptualization* (AC), would be where the students attempt to conceptualize a theory or model of what is observed, critically analyze past beliefs and dispositions, and form new opinions, taking on new roles and assuming new identities. The fourth stage, *active experimentation* (AE), would be where the students are trying to plan (or the way they have planned) forthcoming experiences, i.e. their future endeavors.

After the findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4, I refer back to the two theories described above in Chapter 5 to discuss in further detail how the findings of my research fit into the theoretical framework on transformative and experiential learning processes.

## **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was that the data was collected from one source only: individual interviews with twenty Georgian U.S. study graduates. Data collection required me to travel to Georgia's capital Tbilisi and recruit and interview research subjects within a five-week period. Originally, I had planned to triangulate the data by combining individual interviews with focus groups. I had envisaged receiving enough responses to the recruitment letter to interview twenty graduates individually and set up four focus groups, with 3-4 participants in each group, but as I only received twenty responses, and all of them agreed to be interviewed individually, I proceeded with that approach. I collected the data during the months of July and August, and during this time many people tend to leave Tbilisi for vacation, which might have been one of the reasons why not more than twenty people responded. Additionally, the case with U.S. study graduates often is that they have busy schedules and demanding jobs, so some alumni may have been interested in participating but may not have found the time for it.

Another way to diversify the data sources and reach more participants would have been to utilize a questionnaire in the form of an online survey with open-ended questions about the outcomes of U.S. study experiences. This could have been done prior to my arrival in Georgia and would have allowed those who were not available for an interview to contribute to the research project in writing.

The second limitation is derived from the first, and it is the small sample size. The number of Georgian students receiving higher education in the U.S. has been increasing steadily over the past eight years, with 343 students reported in the 2005/2006 academic year, 353 students in 2006/2007, 378 students in 2007/2008, 407 in 2008/2009, 448 in 2009/2010, and 481 in 2011/2012 (Institute of International Education, *Open Doors*, 2012). My sample of twenty students is a small percentage of the research population.

The third limitation is that though my sampling was purposive (I sought out the alumni who had studied at a higher education institution in the U.S. and had returned to Georgia at least one year prior to the interview<sup>3</sup>), I was not able to ensure equal representation of research subjects in terms of gender; in fact, all of my respondents were female.

Fourth, only one out of twenty participants chose to speak in the native language of Georgian during the interview. The rest chose to speak in English. Although the participants spoke with ease and fluency in English, they may still have not been able to articulate their views, perspectives, and feelings as freely and expressively as they would have in their mother tongue. For this reason, I acknowledge the language factor as one of the limitations of the study.

In addition, in order to better assess the U.S. education outcomes for Georgian students, ideally I would have studied two groups of people: those who have studied in the U.S. and those who have not. This would have allowed for a comparison of the perceptions, attitudes, and achievements between the two groups and may have rendered more compelling findings with respect to the effects of U.S. education. However, in order to fill this void in my study, I often asked the participants to reflect back on themselves in two time periods: pre and post U.S. experiences.

Lastly, due to my status as an international student in the U.S., I have a strong bias towards the positive effects of U.S. education. However, I remained mindful of my beliefs while conducting the interviews and analyzing the data and presented the research participants' reflections in view of their experiences only.

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<sup>3</sup> This requirement was based on the premise that the alumni who had spent at least one year in Georgia post U.S. experience would have more information to share, especially in the domain of career development.

## Summary

This chapter introduced the problem, which essentially constitutes the gap in existing literature on U.S. education outcomes for international students. It was stated that although a large amount of studies have been conducted by scholars about international students in the U.S., a vast majority of these studies have focused on foreign students' experiences while they were still in the U.S. Studies that have sought out foreign graduates of U.S. study programs few years after their graduation with an aim to understand the effects of U.S. experiences on their personalities, attitudes, beliefs, and professional endeavors are extremely scarce, particularly with respect to the students from the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Existing literature contains ample research on study abroad outcomes for American students, however, and inferences are made by different stakeholders in the field of international education about the importance of such research. The present study of U.S. education outcomes for the students from the Republic of Georgia brings into play the perspectives of the international student population that is largely underrepresented in extant research. Hence, the study serves as a valuable addition to the contemporary literature on study abroad outcomes from the reverse point of view: when the U.S. is the destination for a study abroad experience.

After discussing the questions which guided the research, the conceptual framework pertaining to transformative and experiential learning during adulthood was described, and lastly, the limitations of the study were addressed.

The next chapter contains the review of existing literature related to the international education patterns in the U.S. as well as student motivations and expectations for studying in the U.S., and study abroad outcomes in general.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter offers a brief historical overview of international education in the U.S. as well as a brief history of cultural and educational exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. This is followed by an account of international students' motivations to study abroad, and more specifically, international students' motivations for choosing the U.S. as their study abroad destination. Subsequently, a review of literature related to study abroad outcomes (personal, behavioral and attitudinal, social, and professional) is offered, and lastly, the gap in existing literature is described in order to substantiate the significance of the present study and explain how it fits in and contributes to the contemporary literature on U.S. education outcomes for foreign students.

### **Brief History of International Education in the U.S.**

Although international student exchange occurred in the United States as far back as 1742 (Bevis, 2007), a measurable flow of foreign students into America began in the early 1900s (Ottinger, 2009). A census report of higher education institutions in 1930 showed international student attendance in every state (Census, 1930, as cited in Bevis, 2007). Formal U.S. interest in international education began in the 1940s (Harris, 2003, p. 30).

After World War II, there was a national interest in the U.S. in promoting democracy around the world and also an interest in rebuilding countries devastated by war (Ottinger, 2009). In November 1945, the United Nations formed a special agency, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to help promote peace through the sharing of knowledge (UNESCO, 2007). The United States participated in UNESCO educational exchanges and in 1946, legislation introduced by Sen. J. William Fulbright of Arkansas increased opportunities for overseas educational, cultural and informational programs (Fulbright Program, 2006 as cited in Ottinger, 2009).



In 1964, more international students were given the opportunity to study in the United States through the enactment of the Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The objectives of the act were to increase mutual understanding between Americans and people from other lands, strengthen the ties between the United States and other countries through educational and cultural interests, and provide cooperation for advancement in these areas of mutual interest (Fulbright Program, 2006, p.31). The number of foreign students attending American higher education institutions rose from 82,000 in 1964 to 134,000 in 1970 (IIE, *Open Doors*, 2004).

The United States has been a major recipient of international students since the 1960s and numbers have grown rapidly in the intervening years. In 1971, the State Department issued only 65,000 student visas; in 2000 this number had reached 315,000 (Borjas, 2002). By 2003, there were an estimated 586,323 international students in the U.S. representing a 17-fold increase since the mid-1950s (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). The increase in the number of international students has continued since 2006, and according to the most recent count, by the academic year 2011/2012, a total of 764,495 were enrolled in the U.S. higher education institutions (IIE, *Open Doors*, 2012).

### **Brief History of Cultural and Educational Exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union**

“If we are going to take advantage of the assumption that all people want peace, then the problem is for people to get together and to leap governments—if necessary to evade governments—to work out not one method but thousands of methods by which people can gradually learn a little bit more of each other.”

--Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961*

Back in 1950s, President Dwight D. Eisenhower envisioned a people-to-people exchange, with people indeed leapfrogging governments to learn more about each other. But that was not to

be for many years, and in the interim, exchanges had to be negotiated and carried out by governments with their cumbersome bureaucracies, political and security considerations, and under agreements laboriously negotiated and implemented (Richmond, 1987, p.2).

Isolated from the outside world and continually told by their media of all the achievements of the Soviet state, “the Soviet people believed that they were far better off than those who lived in the capitalist West, [and] American knowledge of the Soviet Union was not much better” (Richmond, 1987, p.1).

“It is hard for us now to imagine how distant we were from each other and how little we understood each other,” writes Sergei Khrushchev, son of Nikita Khrushchev, in describing his father’s meeting with Dwight Eisenhower at the July 1955 Four-Power Summit Conference in Geneva.<sup>4</sup> “Living on either side of the iron curtain,” he explains, “we knew nothing about each other. Diplomats and intelligence agents supplied their leaders with information, of course, but that was not enough to gain an understanding of the other side. We had to look into each other’s eyes.”<sup>5</sup>

It took another three years after the Geneva conference before the two sides were able to agree on a cultural agreement that would enable thousands of American and Soviet citizens to meet face to face. Negotiations with the United States began on October 29, 1957 and a U.S.-Soviet agreement on exchanges was signed on January 27, 1958.<sup>6</sup>

The accord was titled “Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Exchanges in the Cultural, Technical, and Educational Fields.” The initial agreement was for a two-year period but it was periodically renegotiated and, during detente when both sides felt more comfortable with exchanges, its validity was extended to three

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<sup>4</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, “The Cold War Through the Looking Glass,” in *American Heritage* 50, October 1999: 37 as cited in Richmond (1987).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> United States Treaties and Other International Agreements (TIAS 3975) vol.9 1958, 13-39.

years. The final agreement in the series, signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev at their 1985 Geneva Summit, was for six years and was allowed to wither away when controls on both sides had been relaxed to the point where an agreement was deemed no longer necessary (Richmond, 2003, p.15).

As evidenced by the historical account, to a great extent, the initial agreement was the result of interest by President Dwight Eisenhower in encouraging people-to-people exchanges.

As Eisenhower put it, he had long advocated

“...this kind of direct people-to-people exchange as one fine, progressive step toward peace in the world. In September of 1956 I initiated a broad-scale People-to-People program—an effort to stimulate private citizens in many fields (the arts, education, athletics, law, medicine, business) to organize themselves to reach across the sea and national boundaries to their counterparts in other lands.”<sup>7</sup>

U.S. objectives, as stated in a National Security Council directive (NSC 5607), were, among others, to broaden and deepen relations with the Soviet Union by expanding contacts between people and institutions; involve the Soviets in joint activities and develop habits of cooperation with the United States; end Soviet isolation and inward orientation by giving the Soviet Union a broader view of the world and of itself; improve U.S. understanding of the Soviet Union through access to its institutions and people; and obtain the benefits of long-range cooperation in culture, education, and science and technology.<sup>8</sup>

Yale Richmond, who worked on U.S. – Soviet exchanges for many years at the State Department, U.S. Information Agency, and the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, and wrote extensively about U.S. – Soviet Union relations, stipulates in his book *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*:

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<sup>7</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 410.

<sup>8</sup> For the full text of NSC 5607, see Richmond (1987), *U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchanges*, 133-37.

*Raising the Iron Curtain*, that the Soviet objectives in the exchanges were not openly stated but, from a study of how they conducted the exchanges, they can be presumed to have included the following: to obtain access to U.S. science and technology, and learn more about the United States, its main adversary; support the view that the Soviet Union was the equal of the United States by engaging Americans in bilateral activities; promote the view that the Soviet Union was a peaceful power seeking cooperation with the United States; demonstrate the achievements of the Soviet people; give vent to the pent-up demand of Soviet scholars, scientists, performing artists, and intellectuals for foreign travel and contacts; and earn foreign currency through performances abroad of Soviet artists (Richmond, 2003, p. 18).

With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of fifteen Former Soviet Union (FSU) countries<sup>9</sup>, the United States launched assistance programs in these countries aimed at accomplishing varied foreign policy objectives, specifically facilitating the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, promoting the introduction and growth of free market economies, and fostering security (Congressional Research Service - *CRS Report for Congress*, 2007). This assistance was enforced through a historic FREEDOM Support Act of 1992<sup>10</sup>, which was sponsored by Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey and other members of Congress and incorporated in the U.S. Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1992-93.<sup>11</sup>

Within the framework of the FREEDOM Support Act of 1992, the U.S. has been providing fully funded scholarships to students and scholars from the FSU countries to study and conduct research in the United States for up to two years. Programs offered are the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program for high school students, the Global Undergraduate

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<sup>9</sup> The FSU countries include: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

<sup>10</sup> For full text of FREEDOM Support Act of 1992, see: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/ctr/docs/s2532.html>. Last retrieved on October 30, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> For full text of U.S. Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1992-1993 see: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/advisory/state/pl102138.html>. Last retrieved on October 30, 2012.

Exchange Program (Global UGRAD), the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program, the Regional Scholars Exchange Program (RSEP) for pre and post doctoral students and faculty, Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) for university level teachers, and the Contemporary Issues Program (CIP) for graduate and post-graduate students. The programs are administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State, which fosters mutual understanding between the United States and other countries through educational exchange and training programs.<sup>12</sup> According to the Bureau, up to 1, 100 participants are recruited and funded through these programs annually.<sup>13</sup> Competition for the programs is merit based, and selection is made on the basis of academic excellence, leadership potential, knowledge of English and of the designated fields of study, and preparedness for study in the United States. Students or scholars who take part in the programs must return home for two years after completion of their programs.<sup>14</sup>

### **Current Trends in International Student Enrollment in the U.S.**

According to *Open Doors 2012* report published annually by the Institute of International Education and based on information submitted by U.S. higher education institutions, in 2011/12, the number of international students in the U.S. increased by 5.7% to a record high of 764,495 students. Out of these students, 309, 342 are enrolled in undergraduate study programs, 300, 430 are enrolled in graduate study programs, and 69, 566 are enrolled in non-degree programs.

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<sup>12</sup> To learn more about all of the exchange programs the U.S. government offers to non-U.S. citizens through BECA, see: <http://exchanges.state.gov/non-us>. Last retrieved on October 30, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> For more facts and figures regarding the impact of ECA exchange programs, see: <http://eca.state.gov/impact/facts-and-figures>, Retrieved September 26, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. "About the Bureau": <http://eca.state.gov/about-bureau>, Retrieved 26 September 2012.

More than half of all international students in the United States come from five countries, including China (25.4%), India (13.1%), South Korea (9.5%), Saudi Arabia (4.5%), Canada (3.5%).

Students from the FSU countries collectively make up only 1.6 percent of the total number of international students enrolled in the U.S higher education institutions as of 2011/12 academic year. (See Table 1 for the breakup of this percentage by each FSU country.)

**Table 1: Total Number of Students from FSU Countries Enrolled in the U.S. as of 2011/12<sup>15</sup>**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Number of students</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Armenia	363	0.05%
Azerbaijan	460	0.06%
Georgia	481	0.06%
Russia	4, 805	0.6%
Moldova	416	0.05%
Ukraine	1, 535	0.2%
Belarus	358	0.04%
Estonia	241	0.03%
Latvia	308	0.04%
Lithuania	288	0.03%
Kazakhstan	1, 938	0.2%
Kyrgystan	254	0.03%
Turkmenistan	209	0.02%
Tajikistan	298	0.03%
Uzbekistan	486	0.06%

Over 40 percent of all international students are enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, which significantly contributes to research in the United States. Other frequently selected college majors include business and management (21.8%), engineering (18.5%), math and computer science (9.3%), social sciences (8.7%), physical and life sciences (8.6%), fine and applied arts (5.1%), health professions (4.5%),

<sup>15</sup> IIE *Open Doors 2012* Fast Facts: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Fast-Facts> Retrieved October 23, 2012.

intensive English language (4.5%), education (2.3%), humanities (2.2%), and agriculture (1.4%) (IIE, *Open Doors*, 2012).

Most international students (63.6%) pay for their higher education with their own or their family funds. U.S. colleges or universities fund approximately 22 percent of international students, mostly at the graduate level through graduate or teaching assistantships. Other sources of funding include foreign students' governments or home universities (5.8%), U.S. government (0.6%), U.S. private sponsors (0.8%), foreign private sponsors (1%), and international organizations (0.2%). Only 4.6% of international students pay for their studies through current employment (Institute of International Education, *Open Doors*, 2012).

### **International Students' Motivations for Studying Abroad**

The choice to study in a different country is a major career decision in an individual's life (Arthur, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to consider international students' career planning needs while exploring the value that higher education adds to them personally and professionally.

Several studies on foreign students and international study that were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s were summarized in an overview by Altbach, Kelly, and Lulat (1985). The overview presented motivations that push and pull students to study abroad, and divided the factors into key variables that home countries used to push students out and host countries used to pull students into their institutions. Factors that were mentioned to push students from the homeland included the scholarship opportunities to study abroad, the poor condition of educational facilities in the home country, lack of research institutions, failure to obtain admission to higher education at home, the prestige in business and industry of a foreign degree, discrimination against minorities, and a politically uncongenial environment. Home countries were motivated to push students out who would return and share the expertise gained

through the foreign study. This was especially true as developing countries found themselves unable to provide educational opportunities in advancing technologies (p. 14).

Those motivating factors that pulled students to other countries were: international life experiences, scholarship opportunities specifically for international students, the quality of the education and research facilities at the institutions, and a congenial socio-economic and political environment to which the student could migrate (Altbach et al. p. 13).

### **International Students' Motivations for Choosing the U.S. as a Study Abroad Destination**

As evidenced by the IIE figures on international student mobility to the U.S., many students from different parts of the world continue to choose the U.S. as their study abroad destination. Some scholars believe that these students view America as a place that values diversity and welcomes people from all nations (e.g., Ottinger, 2009). Others hold that the number of international students keeps increasing because the students view the U.S. as a place of limitless opportunity and culture sharing (e.g., Miller, 2012), and a country with the best educational system in the world (e.g., Altbach, Buport, and Johnstone, 2001).

Professional motivations for overseas study such as improved educational and professional advancement opportunities are particularly common among students from less affluent countries (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Hazen and Alberts (2006) investigated international students' migration intentions, including the factors that students considered in making the decision to migrate to the United States. They implemented a multi-method approach, with six focus groups and several informal conversations with international students from various academic disciplines and countries, complemented by a questionnaire administered among 185 international students at the University of Minnesota. These researchers asked about reasons for coming to the U.S., motivations for staying in the U.S. or returning to the home country.



They found that in addition to career-related reasons for studying in the United States, the desire to experience a new culture also was a highly motivating factor for study abroad.

In order to acquire a deeper understanding of students' motivations and criteria for choosing an international education and to identify the factors that come into play when a student is considering a study period in the United States, Obst and Forster (2004) surveyed 420 international students at 24 U.S. higher education institutions. The 420 survey respondents represented every region of the world and were representative of the overall diversity of the international student population in the United States.

Obst and Forster (2004) found that enhancing career opportunities and gaining experience for future employment, whether at home or internationally, are major contributing factors in a student's decision to study abroad. 78 percent of survey respondents considered a period of study abroad as a way to better their career opportunities. 83 percent of all respondents agreed that the reputation of academic qualifications and degrees from the U.S. was important in their decision to study in the United States.

Additionally, Patricia Chow (2011) conducted another large-scale study to examine the attitudes and perceptions that international students, who are considering studying in the United States, have of U.S. higher education. One of the questions explored during this research was: What attracts students from other countries to study in the U.S.?

A total of 9,330 were surveyed from Vietnam, India, Mexico, Thailand, Hong Kong, Brazil, Germany, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, and South Africa. Chow (2011) found that the U.S. is the destination of choice for the vast majority of respondents worldwide, with three-quarters (75 %) of prospective students reporting the U.S. as their top choice.

Over three-quarters (76 %) of prospective students worldwide perceived the U.S. to have a high quality higher education system; over three-quarters (76 %) of prospective students

worldwide feel the U.S. has a wide range of schools and programs to suit a variety of different students, and over two-thirds (69 %) of prospective students worldwide feel that the U.S. welcomes international students.

### **Existing Research on Study Abroad Outcomes**

Encountering another world, immersing oneself in the daily practices of other people, living and speaking in another language, and learning how others view the world are all touted as the benefits of studying abroad (Dolby, 2004). There seems to be an agreement over the statement that studying in a foreign country provides the opportunity to reflect on the values and way of life of your own country, your own place in that country, and its place in the world. In other words, studying abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself – particularly one’s national identity – in a context that may stimulate new questions, inspire fresh perspectives, and kindle new formulations of that self.

The literature on study abroad outcomes is reviewed below and is sorted under four areas: personality outcomes, behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, social outcomes, and professional outcomes. These four areas are broad enough to encompass virtually all of the aspects where change has occurred for study abroad participants worldwide, as reported by various researchers.

#### Personality Outcomes

Perhaps, one of the largest studies conducted with the aim of examining the long-term influence of studying abroad on a student’s personal, professional, and academic life was undertaken by the Institute for the International Education of Students, or IES Abroad, in 2001. The IES researchers surveyed alumni of various study-abroad programs from 1950 to 1999, regardless of where students studied and for how long. The data from more than 3,400 respondents (23% response rate) showed that studying abroad was usually a defining moment in

a young person's life as it positively and unequivocally influenced the career path, world-view, and self-confidence of students. "I learned a lot more about myself in that one semester than I did in the three and a half years in my home school because of the unique space in which I learned, experienced and spent exploring another culture," said one of the respondents in the IES's study. An overwhelming majority of respondents echoed this feeling. To the questions about personal growth, 97 percent responded that studying abroad served as a catalyst for increased maturity, 96 percent reported increased self-confidence, 89 percent noted exposure to a different culture enabled them to tolerate ambiguity, and 95 percent stated that it has had a lasting influence on their world views. Another finding of the IES's study was that studying abroad led to long-lasting friendships and the experience influenced the decisions students make in their family lives.

Personal growth and development is measured by students' levels of self-efficacy, a term defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Zhai, 2000). Bandura (1994) holds that the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences and that success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy.

At Ohio State University, Zhai (2000) studied the influence of participation in a study-abroad program on American college students' levels of development in terms of global perspective, attitudes toward cultural diversity, and self-efficacy. He also sought to investigate students' changes in their career interests, attitudes toward the host and home countries and knowledge and skills they gained while studying abroad. Zhai's sample consisted of 21 students who studied abroad and 77 students who did not. He collected data via questionnaire surveys and interviews and found that studying abroad contributed to students' development of intercultural

sensitivity. Participants were aware of and open to cultural diversity and that the experience provided new challenges to participants and assisted them in becoming more confident.

On a much smaller scale, Erichsen (2009) examined how seven female international graduate students have made sense of their experiences and how they have personally changed during their time in the U.S. Putting his study in the theoretical framework comprised of transformative learning, symbolic interactionism, and intercultural competency, Erichsen used a qualitative research approach and collected data primarily from multiple semi-structured, in-depth interviews with seven participants. The author's findings from this research can be organized into two sets of themes: First, international students' learning was represented through the learning themes of getting lost and re-definition. Second, the theme of discovering new selves represented the participants' narratives. The intercultural competencies of confidence in navigating a new context, becoming a more open and critical thinker, gaining a stronger sense of self and one's own culture, and taking on multiple perspectives were the described positive effects of living abroad in Erichsen's study. Conceptually, it was argued that the experience of studying as an international student is both transformative and greatly influences identity development. According to Erichsen (2009) living within an international context eventually requires us "to reconcile ourselves and our identity between our past and present contexts, and in doing so we cannot help but be transformed" (p.16). In other words, we eventually develop an ability to make sense of our lives and the contexts that define us by stepping back and reflecting on the experiences and feelings associated with those experiences, and then reconstructing our personal narratives.

Additionally, Sato (2009) sought to determine whether and how short-term study abroad programs transform college students' perspectives and how they influence subsequent academic choices, career, personal and social development, host country knowledge and attitudes and

global perspectives. This researcher collected data from one hundred and eleven alumni of five-week summer programs in China, France, Italy and Spain, between one and five years after program participation, using Internet and paper surveys. He supplemented the survey responses with qualitative data collected from twelve alumni, as well as the faculty directors of each program via interviews. Sato's research results indicated that the programs had some influence on academic choices and career development, but more influence on personal and social development. Sato (2009), just like the IES (2001) and Erichsen (2009) found that areas most influenced included self-confidence, self-awareness, maturity, and receptivity to conflicting opinions and attitudes, as well as the complexity of international outlook.

According to Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005), students say that studying abroad "brought them a greater understanding of other cultures, that it had helped them appreciate their own culture more, that it enabled them to learn more about themselves, and that it had enriched them personally" (p. 56). Simply spending time in another culture, while studying abroad, does not necessarily guarantee understanding and acceptance of another culture. Coffman and Brennan (2003) asserted, "...study abroad programs should not be facilitators of cultural voyeurism; they should be sincere efforts to learn -- and, where necessary, to learn how to unlearn - by acquiring the sorts of skills that enable one to be sensitive, responsive, connective, and reflective (p. 143).

### Behavioral and Attitudinal Outcomes

Rhodes (1997) pointed out that study abroad can mean "gaining access to a new kind of intellectual community" (p. 1). Koskinen and Tossavainen (2003) stated, "...one can only learn intercultural sensitivity within human interaction and through personal development ... relationships may be the key element in learning in a foreign educational context" (p. 501).

During study abroad, Koskinen and Tossavainen (2004) found that when Finnish nursing students worked in Britain, "the growing intercultural awareness and maturation caused by the stressful adjustment to differences might be the key components of becoming interculturally competent" (p. 112).

When questioned about intercultural development in the survey, 98 percent of respondents in the IES study stated that studying abroad helped them to better understand their own cultural values and biases, and 82 percent replied that studying abroad contributed to developing a sophisticated way of looking at the world (Dwyer & Peters, 2004).

The IES research findings emphasized that intercultural benefits were not fleeting but continued to influence participants' lives long after their time abroad. Almost all of the respondents (94%) in this study reported that the experience continued to influence interactions with people from different cultures, and 23 percent still maintain contact with host-country friends. Ninety percent said that the experience influenced them to seek out a greater diversity of friends, and 64 percent said that it also influenced them to explore other cultures. "The experience of living and studying in another country was so eye-opening... [it] tested preconceptions and habits I wasn't even aware were so ingrained in me," testified one of the respondents surveyed for this research (cited in Dwyer & Peters, 2004, p.24).

In 2002, researchers Kitsantas and Meyers implemented a study aimed at investigating the role of study abroad programs specifically on students' cross-cultural awareness (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002). Twenty-four students, who were enrolled in a study abroad course at an American university, participated in the study. The students' cross-cultural awareness was assessed prior to and after studying abroad using the Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory test (CCAI). These two authors hypothesized that students studying abroad would score higher on all the CCAI scales including emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity, and

personal autonomy than would the control group. All hypotheses were supported by the results, indicating that a period of study abroad enhanced the students' cross cultural awareness (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002).

Two years later, Kitsantas conducted another study in which she examined the broader influence that study abroad programs have on students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding and the role that students' goals for participating in study abroad programs play on the development of these outcomes. Within this particular study, Kitsantas (2004) queried two hundred and thirty-two study abroad college students regarding their cross-cultural skills prior to and at completion of the program. A factor analysis of the Study Abroad Goals Scale (SAGS) revealed three factors that students reported for joining study abroad programs: 1) to enhance their cross-cultural skills, 2) to become more proficient in the subject matter and 3) to socialize. Based on the survey results, Kitsantas (2004) concluded that overall students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding improved; but students' goals to study abroad influenced the magnitude of these outcomes. Namely, only the first factor (cross-cultural competence) significantly predicted students' global understanding and cross-cultural skills.

Sharing the research interest of Kitsantas and Meyers, Patterson (2006) conducted research with the purpose of determining the effect study abroad has on the development of intercultural learning and sensitivity with students at a mid-sized state-supported university in the Midwest. Patterson's research compared the students participating in study abroad programs with those participating in on-campus courses in terms of intercultural development. Quantitative data were collected through the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) survey tool, and statistical functions used for data analysis included paired samples *t* -test and independent sample *t* -test. Patterson (2006) collected qualitative data from interviews with study-abroad students and emailed questionnaires to on-campus students at the end of the semester. She found voices of

change in both groups. Results of the statistical analysis revealed that the groups progressed differently on several scales of the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS); the study-abroad group revealed noticeable changes.

Two years later, Keefe (2008) attempted to describe the relationship of short-term study abroad programs to the development of students' global competencies and other outcomes by addressing these research questions: 1) Do students' global competencies, as defined by level of intercultural sensitivity, change as a result of short-term study abroad courses? 2) To what extent and in what manner do student students' demographic characteristics relate to the development of intercultural sensitivity? 3) What additional outcomes are developed through participation in short-term study abroad courses?

Using a sequential explanatory, mixed-methods approach, Keefe's study examined five short-term study abroad courses offered at a small, public, liberal arts college in the Northeast. Data were collected from pre-travel and post-travel administrations of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to sixty-nine participants and by eight student interviews. While, results from Keefe's quantitative part of the research did not indicate significant growth in intercultural sensitivity, qualitative analysis did identify growth in students' self-awareness, interest in and openness to other cultures (Keefe, 2008).

Others scholars (Dolby, 2004; Drews & Meyer, 1996) also found that studying abroad makes students aware of their own national identity and influences how they view people from other nationalities. In one particular study, students noted that they had developed a deeper interest in the well-being of others, an understanding of multinational economic and cultural issues (Kuh, 1995).

Some scholars hold that becoming intercultural is a dynamic and complex process which varies with each individual and with each context and situation. It takes a deliberate and willful



determination to engage in and experience another culture, and to reflect on and be transformed by that experience (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003). From this process, the individuals develop a growing intercultural identity by which they can negotiate in, learn from, and freely move between two or more differing cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992).

In addition, according to Mezirow's Theory of Perspective Transformation, sojourners who have learned to look at the world from a different point of view tend to become interculturally competent as their perspective is becoming more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative (Mezirow, 1994). Transformation implies that the sojourner is in some ways not the same person following the learning process as before the process starts as the "sojourner's 'old' person breaks up, and the intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral capacities construct a 'new' person at a higher level of integration" (Kim & Ruben, 1988, p. 314 cited in Meade, 2010). Deardorff (2004) has suggested the outcome of this transformational process is "a new intercultural person" (p.16).

### Social Outcomes

Much research on the benefits of studying abroad has focused on the individual benefit to participants. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence on the experiences of American college students who have studied abroad. In 2009, professors Gerald Fry and Michael Paige of University of Minnesota completed research examining the long-term effects of study abroad and the benefits to "society at large" such as civic engagement, philanthropy, knowledge production, social entrepreneurship, and voluntary simplicity. The researchers surveyed 6,391 people from twenty-two higher education institutions who had studied abroad during the last fifty years. They found a high level of civic engagement.

According to Ehrlich (2000) in *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, civic engagement means "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and

developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference” (p.6). A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger society and, therefore, considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate (Ehrlich, 2000, p.7).

The Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership at the University of Maryland defines civic engagement as “a phenomenon encompassing the notions of global citizenship and interdependence.” Through civic engagement, individuals – as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world, are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world. The CCEL further explains that civic engagement could be demonstrated through one or more of the following:

- Learning from others, self, and environment to develop informed perspectives on social issues;
- Recognizing and appreciating human diversity and commonality;
- Behaving, and working through controversy, with civility;
- Participating actively in public life, public problem solving, and community service;
- Assuming leadership and membership roles in organizations;
- Developing empathy, ethics, values, and sense of social responsibility;
- Promoting social justice locally and globally.

Paige & Fry (2009) found that there are generational differences in how civic engagement is demonstrated by study abroad graduates, with more recent graduates showing a high level of volunteerism, while graduates from the 1960s and '70s are in a financial position to be philanthropic.

Donahue (2009) also found that study abroad experience is associated with promoting more active and responsible citizenship. He maintains that studying abroad facilitates the process of *conscientization*, or the process by which individuals "achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and...their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (Freire, 1997, p. 27 as cited in Donahue, 2009, p. 48).

### Professional Outcomes

Arthur (2008), a psychologist and professor at the University of Calgary with extensive experience working with international students argues that "if the main motives for studying abroad are linked to academic and employment success, then from the time of arriving in the host country, students should be preparing for their eventual return home, including their future career plans" (p. 282).

It is commonly agreed upon that the effects of studying abroad go beyond promoting academic and cultural enrichment and personal growth. There is evidence both in research and in practice supporting the claim that education abroad also enhances one's employment prospects. Employers increasingly seek graduates who have studied abroad. They know that students, who have successfully completed an advanced degree program in that country's language, are likely to possess very strong cross-cultural communication skills, analytical skills, an understanding of and familiarity with local customs and cultural contexts, flexibility, resilience, and the ability to adapt to new circumstances and deal with differences constructively. Last but not least, fluency in a foreign language is a valuable asset that students gain through studying in a foreign country (Good & Campbell 1997).

In our ever-shrinking world, it will soon be difficult not to be involved in the global marketplace wherever one works and whatever one does. Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver, and Weaver (1992) found that studying abroad influenced students' future directions in life and

vocation. Students with study abroad experience were more easily hired or promoted in international business firms (Harris, 1993 cited in Zhai, 2000). Miller (1993) revealed that studying abroad provided the necessary learning tools in today's world and was on the cutting edge of expanding career possibilities.

When questioned about academic and career pursuits, 87 percent of respondents from the IES's research said that studying abroad influenced subsequent educational experiences, 64 percent said that it influenced their decision to attend graduate school while nearly half of all respondents have engaged in international work or volunteerism since studying abroad. Three-quarters of respondents asserted that they acquired skill sets abroad that influenced their career path, and 62 percent said that studying abroad ignited an interest in a career direction pursued after the experience (IES, 2001).

Fry (2008) examined the long-range influence of study abroad on the participants in terms of (1) career development, (2) educational attainment, (3) knowledge and skills acquired, and (4) their basic values and world view. Using a mixed-methods research design, this study provided rich data on 669 study abroad alumni from six diverse universities located across the U.S. The research participants completed a detailed electronic survey. Fifty-three respondents, plus subjects from an additional institution, who did not participate in the survey, were interviewed intensively to probe deeper into the nature of their study abroad experiences and their influence on their subsequent lives. Fry (2008) found that the study abroad experience has strongly and positively influenced all of the four variables listed above.

Yates (2002) asserted that "global citizenship makes an applicant stand out" (p. 6). In other words, "international experience carries more weight on your resume than a similar job at home" (Hackbarth, 2002, p. 57).

## **Gap in Existing Literature**

Overall, previous research has greatly contributed to our knowledge of the rewards and struggles international students undergo during their stay in the United States. However, most studies have focused on international students' transition into higher education and related interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustment difficulties, as well as linguistic, academic, and social challenges (e.g., Arthur, 2008; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Singaravelu & Pope, 2007). Some research addressed international students' expectations about higher education (e.g., Chow, 2011; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, & Ling, 2004). Various studies have examined international students' difficulties with adjusting to the U.S. educational system and culture (e.g., Al- Sharideh & Goe, 1998), and the factors that impact international students' career decision making (e.g., Jachowicz, 2007; Shen & Herr, 2004).

Existing literature also contains research on study abroad outcomes, as presented in this chapter. However, these studies almost exclusively have examined study abroad outcomes for American college students. Few studies have addressed international students' experiences related to their preparation for the transition out of higher education into the world of work, either in their home countries or internationally (Leung, 2007; Arthur, 2008). Nor does much research exist on international students' perceived value that studying in the United States adds to them personally and professionally, their expectations from higher education related to their professional and personal development and future career goals, and the extent to which international students are engaged in their own goal attainment (Urban, 2012, p.7).

How does a study abroad experience in the U.S. affect foreign students' personalities, beliefs, attitudes, lifestyle, and future endeavors? Is the impact comparable to the one that American students experience as a result of studying abroad? Extant literature falls short in

providing this type of knowledge particularly in respect to the U.S. - educated students from the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries.

The proposed study builds up research on U.S. education outcomes for international students by producing new knowledge on how a group of Georgian alumni of U.S. study programs have made sense of their experiences, and how these experiences have reshaped their personalities, attitudes, and perceptions and equipped them with new skills necessary for building successful careers.

### **Summary**

We can summarize the findings from the review of contemporary literature as follows: first, while quite a few researchers have touched upon the issues related to international students on American college and university campuses, the majority of these studies have been concerned with the experiences of the foreign students during their study abroad period, i.e. while they were still in the United States.

Second, extant research on study abroad outcomes is almost exclusively focused on study abroad outcomes for American college students. Few studies have explored international students' perceptions about how living and studying in the U.S. has enriched them personally and professionally.

It is important to know if the investment of staff, funds, and other resources to conduct international study programs are justified by their contributions to students' international education, and international educators believe the field will benefit from new research studies that explore study abroad program participants' perceptions about the benefits of their experiences.

The proposed study builds up research on U.S. education outcomes for international students by producing new knowledge about a group of international students in the U.S., which is largely underrepresented in contemporary literature.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used in conducting this study. First, I present the rationale and description of the qualitative research paradigm. Next I explain how research participants were selected and recruited and how data were collected. Afterward, I describe the procedures that were followed during data analysis, and finally, data verification methods and ethics are addressed.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

The purpose of this study was to understand the long-term outcomes of living and studying in the U.S. for students from the Republic of Georgia. To this end, I interviewed twenty graduates of U.S. study programs, who had completed at least one academic year at a U.S. college or university either on an undergraduate or graduate level and had returned to Georgia after the completion of the program. I identified four domains, or areas of interest, in order to create a framework for the study. These four domains are: personal development, intercultural competence, civic engagement, and career development. I chose to focus on these four constructs as they encompassed all areas that I was interested to explore changes in: personality, beliefs, attitudes, civic engagement, and professional achievements.<sup>16</sup>

The nature of this research was exploratory. Therefore, a qualitative study method entailing in-depth interviewing was employed. Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as research that is “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). According to Merriam, qualitative research has four main characteristics: the focus is on process, meaning and understanding; the primary instrument of data collection and analysis is the researcher; the

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to Research Question section of Chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation of the basis for selecting the four domains.



process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive. Another common characteristic of qualitative research is that the sample is purposive and small (Merriam, 2009).

My research fits Merriam's description of qualitative research. First, my goal was to understand the study abroad graduates' experiences, perceptions and beliefs. More specifically, I was interested in how they make meaning out of their experiences. Second, the data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

The central question that I posed to each participant was: "*Looking back over your U.S. study experience, how do you think it has affected your life?*" I then mentioned the domains I was interested in in an open-ended manner. "You can tell me about the changes you have observed in your personality, beliefs, attitudes, skills, civic engagement and career, or you may tell me about other consequences that have importance to you but are related to something entirely different."

Third, I, as the researcher, was both the instrument of data collection and the primary instrument of data analysis. The research process was primarily inductive as I sought to identify themes and build hypotheses emergent from the data, rather than deductively testing hypotheses.

Fourth, my product is descriptive in nature; it uses words and quotes to describe what I learned, rather than numbers or graphs. Finally, my design was flexible and able to respond to changing conditions, and my sample was small and purposeful. For all these reasons, my research fits the qualitative research paradigm.

Review of previous studies focused on study abroad outcomes reveals that there is limited research regarding the long-term impact of such educational experiences, and most of the research conducted is quantitative with limited qualitative components (Akande & Slawson, 2000). In-depth interviewing enables an examination of nuances that may have been missed by many quantitative research instruments (Seidman, 1991). In other words, a qualitative method is

usually utilized in an effort to examine the research questions in sufficient depth so that one who has not experienced study abroad may understand its impacts (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Indeed, lengthy interviews with twenty participants allowed for the exploration of the changes the U.S. study program graduates experienced in their personalities, beliefs, attitudes, skills, civic engagement, and careers.

## **Data Collection**

### Population and sample

When conducting research on experience outcomes, it could be beneficial to study a specific group, in this case, students from one specific region or a specific country separately, as this may allow a higher degree of generalization of the findings. The degrees of influence as well as the affected areas may vary depending on where students come from. For example, students from more collectivistic countries, such as China, India, and the former Soviet republics may experience a more dramatic change in their personalities than students from liberal, individualistic countries such as Canada, France or Netherlands. Similarly, students from well-established civil societies may return home with a different degree of passion to become more active and responsible citizens and transport democratic values in their respective countries than those students from emerging democracies; countries that are experiencing a transition from a secluded, communist or totalitarian regimes into open, capitalistic and egalitarian systems (Miller, 1993; Zhai, 2000).

I chose to study U.S. education outcomes for Georgian students because as a native of Georgia, who has spent a significant part of adult life in the United States in pursuit of higher education, I possess knowledge of the history of Georgia, its language, traditions, and customary lifestyles, which connect me to the selected population. I can also relate to the experiences of the participants of this study, which further connects me to the topic of this research.

The population of the study consists of all Georgian students who have attended a U.S. higher education institution either on an undergraduate or graduate level for at least one academic year with a status of an international student. The sample consists of twenty alumni of two U.S. study programs: Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD)<sup>17</sup> and Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program,<sup>18</sup> both of which are administered by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) office in Tbilisi, Georgia. Eight participants are the alumni of the Global UGRAD program, eight are the alumni of the Muskie program, and four participants have studied in the U.S. under both programs. I was particularly interested in the participants of these two programs as I wanted to explore study abroad outcomes for Georgian students who have received higher education in the U.S., and the alumni of these programs were an accessible target group for my research given the assistance provided by IREX in reaching out to them on my behalf.

### Participant selection

According to the research available, there are many factors determining the impact of studying abroad. Specifically, researchers have indicated that program type, location, and duration may vary the effects on the participants. For example, Parr (1988) found that year-long programs were better for language acquisition, and Martin (1987) concluded that longer periods abroad positively affected levels of intercultural competence. Typically, students experience

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<sup>17</sup> The Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (also known as the Global UGRAD Program) provides one semester and academic year scholarships to outstanding undergraduate students from underrepresented sectors in East Asia, Eurasia and Central Asia, the Near East and South Asia and the Western Hemisphere for non-degree full-time study combined with community service, internships and cultural enrichment. See more at: <http://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/global-undergraduate-exchange-program-global-ugrad#sthash.EgA22ksf.dpuf>

<sup>18</sup> The Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program brings emerging leaders in key professional fields from Eurasia to the United States for one to two years of graduate study. Through academic studies, internships, and community service, fellows make direct connections with American universities, businesses, social-service organizations, and citizens. See more at: <http://www.irex.org/project/edmund-s-muskie-graduate-fellowship-program>

culture shock at the initial stage of their study abroad experience; hence the first few weeks, and in some cases first few months, serve as an adjustment period. One would assume that visiting students gain a meaningful experience abroad largely as a result of immersion in the new environment and immersion, as argued by Anthony et al (2011) must be cultivated as a "state of mind - a motivation, desire, ability to actively engage in the host culture. Time is an important factor in the formation of such state of mind" (p.42).

By selecting the alumni of Global UGRAD and Muskie graduate fellowship programs, the above-listed criteria were fulfilled given that the participants all represent the same country of origin, and they have travelled to the same host country. Also, all of the participants have spent at least one full academic year in the U.S. Additionally, length of time since program completion was considered when selecting the respondents. Some of the studies that have examined long-term impact of study abroad, have considered participants at least five years after program participation for American college students studying abroad (Carlson et al, 1988; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006).

For this research, the requirement for minimum time since program completion was set at two years, so I interviewed the graduates at least two years after they had returned to Georgia from the U.S. This specific criterion was based on the assumption that the participants would need time to re-adjust to their home countries, reconcile their transformed selves, new ideas, new knowledge and skills, and put them into action.

### Participant recruitment

Research participants were recruited through a letter of solicitation (See Appendix A) sent out to the listserv of the alumni of the Global UGRAD and Muskie graduate fellowship programs. I initially contacted the director of the International Research and Exchanges Board

(IREX) in Tbilisi, Georgia and introduced my research project to him. He then offered to send out the participant recruitment email to the listserv for the alumni of the two programs.

The email contained the letter of solicitation, which provided information about me, as the researcher, and described the purpose of the study. It was also noted in the letter that due to the interests of the study, only the alumni who had returned to Georgia two or more years ago would qualify as a research subject. The participants were guaranteed anonymity upon request and were assured of safe handling of all information provided by them. The letter of solicitation was sent out on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Interested alumni then responded to me personally, after which I followed up with them through private email messages and phone calls to clear any remaining questions or concerns and set up an interview. The interviews were conducted during the months of July and August, 2011.

#### Location/Setting

I interviewed all of the twenty participants in person, in Tbilisi, Georgia at various semi-public places such as a library, coffee shop, book store, and park.

#### Data Collection Technique

As previously stated, I employed the technique of in-depth interviewing in this qualitative study. I conducted all of the interviews myself and presented the option of speaking in Georgian or English to each participant, keeping in mind that even though they have all acquired fluency in English during their studies, they may have been more comfortable, more articulate, and more expressive when reflecting on their experiences in the native language. Only one out of twenty people opted to speak in Georgian, however. The rest spoke in English and only switched to Georgian if using certain idiomatic expressions and cultural references to better illustrate their points.

In the beginning of each interview, I briefly described the nature and purpose of my study, and encouraged the participants to ask any questions they may have had about me or the study. Afterwards, I gave a descriptive consent form (See Appendix B) to each participant and allowed a few minutes for them to review it. I also let the participants know that they had the option of withdrawing from the research at any time without giving any explanation. An average length of the interview was one hour. I allowed the participants to tell me about their experiences and reflections at their own pace, with minimal leading or coaching from my end. I wanted the interview to be based on storytelling, so the central question that I posed to each participant was: *“Looking back over your U.S. study experience, how do you think it has affected your life?”* I then mentioned the domains I was interested in in an open-ended manner. “You can tell me about the changes you have experienced in your personality, beliefs, attitudes, skills, civic engagement, and career, or you may tell me about other consequences that have importance to you and are related to something entirely different.”

With the permission of the participants, I recorded the conversations with a digital voice recorder (Philips 615 Voice Tracer Digital Recorder) and asked follow-up and clarification questions as needed. I took notes for follow-up questions and asked them later so that I would not interrupt their thought processes. I also kept a memo book in which I jotted down potential themes as they started emerging during the conversation. At the end of the interviews, I asked the participants if they would accept a follow up e-mail message or a phone call in case some questions or uncertainties arose during data processing and analyzing. All of the participants consented.

I transferred the recorded data to a USB memory key and a CD after each interview to ensure double data back-up. At that time, I also reviewed notes to determine whether any topics remained unclear or needed further exploration.

## **Data Analysis**

### Transcription

I transcribed all of the interviews verbatim and typed up all of the notes from my memo book. I also translated the one interview recorded in Georgian. Before beginning the data analysis process, I emailed each interview transcript to the respective respondent for their review and verification of accuracy. In conformation to the IRB regulations, I kept the electronic data in a safe, locked drawer in my home office. I initially read the transcript of each interview separately to focus on the respondent's stories, perceptions, and reflections. I tried to identify key ideas, topics, or themes in that interview. I grouped together comments at different times in the interview that seemed to be related or connected to each other in some way. Then I began to compare the data in different interviews. I looked for comments by different respondents about the same topics to see what common points they had made and to highlight the experiences and ideas that stood out.

The stories and opinions expressed during the interviews were clear and elaborated so it was not necessary to follow up with the respondents later in order to seek further information.

### Coding

Coding refers to a “systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analyzable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data” (Lockyer, 2004, pg.137). In other words, it is the process that permits data to be “segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (Grbich, 2007, p. 21). Bernard (2006) states that analysis “is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place” (p. 452). Coding is thus a method that

enables us to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or “families” because they share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern.

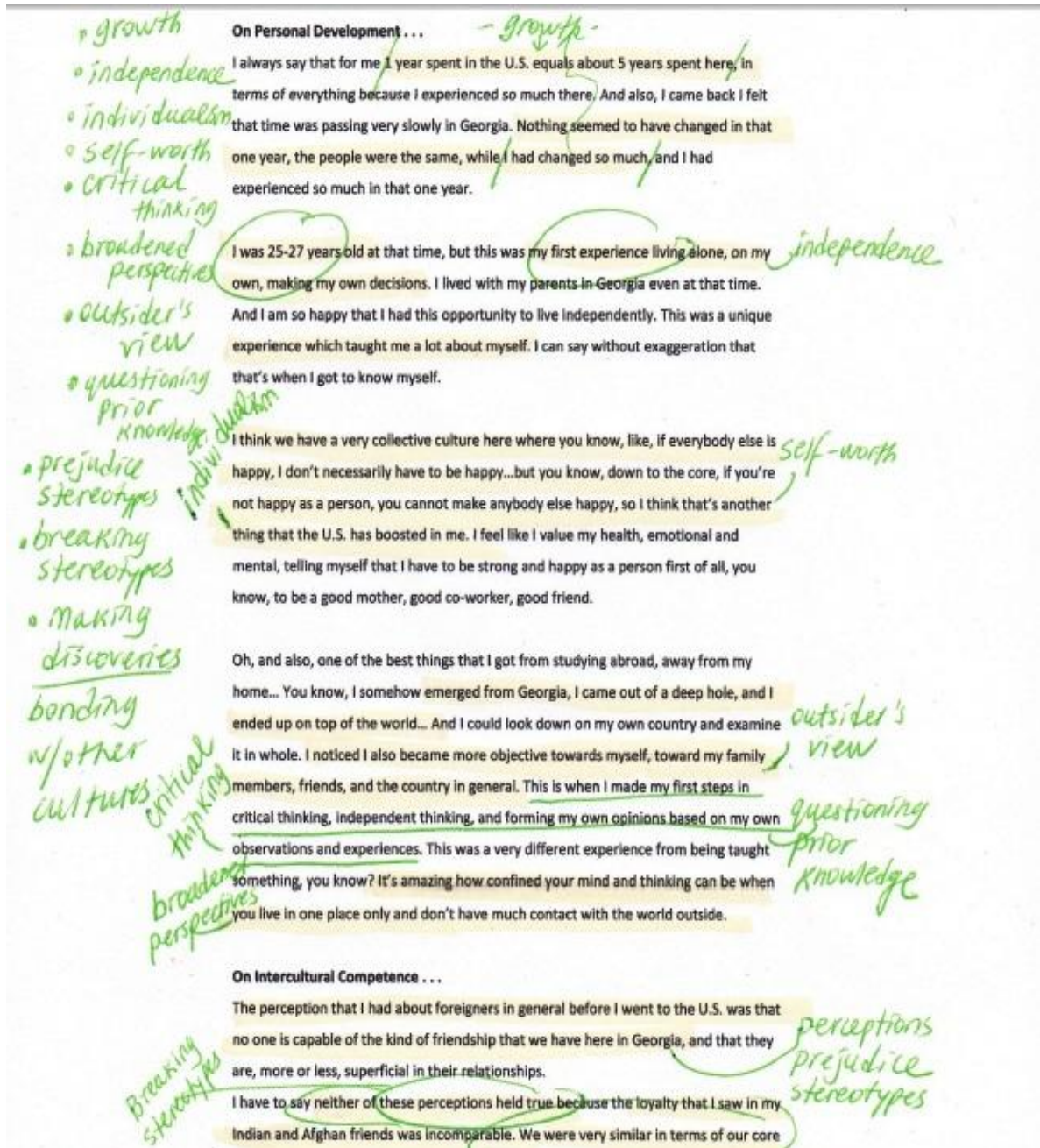
I coded the data by applying both deductive and inductive coding strategies. In the deductive strategy, “the researcher has some orienting constructs and propositions to test or observe in the field,” and in the inductive approach, “the researcher discovers recurrent phenomena in the stream of local experience and finds recurrent relations among them” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 155).

My orienting constructs were the four domains I identified in order to create a framework for the study. Thus, I started the data analysis process with four pre-developed coding categories: “personal development”, “intercultural competence”, “civic engagement”, and “career development.” The recurring points that I later searched for in the participants’ responses created the themes that emerged within the four pre-developed coding categories.

Initially, I read all of the interview transcripts from start to finish without coding. On the second read, I focused on individual interviews. First I organized the responses under each pre-developed coding category, i.e. I created a heading with title “On personal development. . .” and arranged all comments related to personal development in the given interview under this title. Next, I highlighted specific words and lines in the text, which constituted a theme. I used the marginal space on the hardcopy of the transcript to jot down emergent themes, using code words, as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1. Example of Initial Coding and Marginal Remarks on Interview Transcript**



I treated each interview transcript the same way, and at the end of this initial coding process, I had fleshed out a total of thirty-four themes within all of the four pre-developed

categories. For example, in the domain of Personal Development, the following themes emerged: “independence”, “self-worth”, “maturity”, “individualism”, “confidence”, “self-empowerment”, “goal-setting”, “self-efficacy”. In the domain of Intercultural Competence, some of the initial codes applied were: “first time befriending foreigners”, “finding commonalities with foreign friends”, “broadened perspectives”, “non-judgmental attitude”, “respect for differences”, “intellectual curiosity”, “tolerance”, “cultural stereotypes”, “stereotypes not holding true”, “altered perspectives”, “questioning prior knowledge”, “outsider’s view on own country”. Under Civic Engagement, the responses were grouped under these initial themes: “apathy prior to U.S. experience”, “mistrust”, “lack of awareness on citizens’ rights and responsibilities”, “observations on civic activities in the U.S.”, “motivation to become an active citizen”, “apathy is unhealthy”, “initiatives to affect change”, “significance of affecting change on small scale”, “acting as catalyst for change”. Finally, in the domain of Career Development, the participants’ responses were labeled with the following code phrases: “skills acquired”, “analytic thinking”, “exporting American work ethic”, “success story”, and “illustration of leadership”.

As the next step, related codes were merged. Once codes were merged, the number of themes was reduced to ten. Figure 2 illustrates how the final ten themes fell under each domain.

**Figure 2. Themes under Each Domain**

<b>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE</b>	<b>CIVIC ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>CAREER DEVELOPMENT</b>
Individualism	Dismissing stereotypes and bonding with other cultures	Attitudes and perceptions about citizens’ roles and responsibilities prior to U.S. experience	Skills and qualities, gained in the U.S
Self-confidence	Becoming more tolerant and less judgmental of differences	Changed attitudes and perceptions on citizens’ roles and responsibilities post U.S. experience	Leadership positions held post U.S. experience
Self-efficacy	Gaining an outsider’s view on own country		

Once I had the final list of themes, I extracted the passages corresponding to each theme from each interview transcript and sorted them under appropriate labels. In order to keep track of who the quote belonged to, I labeled each participant's response with their initials. Figure 3 illustrates how the amalgamated data looked at this stage of analysis.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 3. Data Sample Extracted from Interviews and Sorted by Themes**

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT		
Individualism	Self-confidence	Self-efficacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I was 25-27 years old at that time, but this was my first experience living alone, on my own, making my own decisions. I lived with my parents in Georgia even at that time. And I am so happy that I had this opportunity to live independently and grow through the obstacles I had to overcome. (NK)</li> <li>- When you are plucked out and put in a different setting and you're on your own, you cannot depend on anybody, you rely on yourself only, so when you end up in puzzling situations, you are forced to think and to take responsibility for your actions and find solutions.(MM)</li> <li>- That was the kind of life I was looking for; having independence, living away from my family. (LI)</li> <li>- All of a sudden I had freedom in a lot of ways: freedom of making my own decisions and being in control of my life. (MB)</li> <li>- I ended up in the situation where I couldn't rely on my friends, parents, brother, father's friends etc. It was tough, but in retrospect, it was wonderful because I can say without exaggeration that that's when I got to know myself. (NV)</li> <li>- When you're on your own in an unfamiliar environment, you discover yourself. (EB)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People found it interesting to see that I was no longer an introvert, which I was before I left. I was much more open and comfortable when socializing with people. (LI)</li> <li>- Looking back now , the one big thing that studying in the U.S. gave me was to become more open and less shy. I say that I'm still shy, but I learned how to hide it. (NK)</li> <li>- Speaking of low self-esteem, knowing about how many good friends I have from different countries makes me think I can't be that bad if, you know, he or she wants to be my friend because they're so awesome. So like I said, it makes me a very rich person that I know so many people from different walks of life and of different nationalities. (MM)</li> <li>- The U.S. was comfortable because you feel like a person, people respect you even if you're a foreigner and aren't established as a professional there, and, well, it seems that you have higher self-esteem. You feel empowered and it propels you towards good things and success. (TK)</li> <li>- I found it very difficult to socialize with people, to start a conversation, I used to blush and everything. But there I learned how to speak in front of people, even deliver a speech! (LI)</li> <li>- I became egoistic in a good way. (MM)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge, skills, perspectives I gained from that experience, matured me as a person and gave me an amazing sense of achievement, and then I thought, wow, if I could do this, that means I can do anything. (MM)</li> <li>- It gave me opportunities and it showed me that if I want to have a better life, I can achieve it, even as a little girl from Georgia. If I am energetic, if I have a goal and the will, I can do things. And that's a huge motivation.(NSH)</li> <li>- I believe in myself now. I believe that if I try hard, I'll be able to achieve what I have set my mind to. (LP)</li> <li>- I became ambitious and strong and I kind of knew who I was in life and I also created a plan for the next 10 years and I strictly followed that plan. (TG)</li> <li>- Before I never really set goals, I used to go with the flow and see what happened. But being in the U.S., I saw how people set goals and had a strategy to achieve these goals...I was quite amazed by that. I loved it. I wanted to be the same way. (NK)</li> <li>- Being in the U.S. didn't change who I was, but it changed my attitude, thoughts, ideas, and most of all my way of life. I have an action plan for my life now. I know my capabilities and where I want to go. (ST)</li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> This figure shows only a portion of data for one of the four domains.

### **Verification of Data**

To accomplish trustworthiness, I relied on peer examination. Peer examination means having a colleague or knowledgeable person review the data and assess whether the findings are consistent with the data (Merriam, 2009). Two of my peers, who are also conducting doctoral research, performed this function. After the initial coding of the data, during which I identified thirty-four themes, I consulted my peer reviewers, who read the transcripts and helped me determine which codes were closely related and hence could have been merged.

To ensure further validity and trustworthiness of the data, I emailed transcribed interviews to respective respondents before beginning any type of analysis and sought approval of accuracy from them.

Another possibility might have been to share portions of my preliminary analysis with the interviewees and obtain their feedback. I decided, however, that the data in the interviews were sufficiently clear and that further member checks were not necessary.

### **Researcher Bias**

As an international graduate student from the Republic of Georgia, I am personally connected to this research. I view the research participants as a unique generation of people in the Georgian society who carry a wealth of new, refreshing knowledge, skills and new ways of thinking. I am most honored to be in the position to facilitate the uncovering and sharing of these new knowledge and experiences which are likely to be comparable to mine. For this reason, I, as a facilitator, perceive myself as more of an insider, rather than an outsider of my own research.

Due to my experiences as an international student at a U.S. university, I have certain bias regarding the positive effects of studying in the U.S. In an effort to limit how my biases affect my interpretation of the data and maintain my own trustworthiness, I remained mindful of my

beliefs during the interviews and while analyzing the data; I understood my participants' beliefs in view of their experiences and kept my beliefs separate from theirs.

A problem with interviews could be that respondents may report what they think they should say instead of what they really do or believe (McKay, 2006). I tried to reduce this problem by conducting the interviews in a nonjudgmental way and assuring confidentiality. It might also have helped that I am a student (a peer) rather than a program administrator.

### **Ethics**

This study protected research participants' rights in the following ways:

1. IRB's Human Subjects Research procedures were followed.
2. Research objectives were shared with participants.
3. Participants signed informed consent forms before being interviewed.
4. Participants were notified of their right to withdraw from research at any time.
5. Participant anonymity was ensured when reporting the findings of the research.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the methodology I used to conduct the present study. I conducted qualitative research and collected data through individual, in-depth interviews with twenty Georgian alumni of U.S. study programs, who had completed at least 1 academic year at a U.S. college or university on an undergraduate or a graduate level. I transcribed the interviews myself and manually coded and sorted the data. For the purposes of data verification, I relied on peer examination and member check, and standard ethical practices were employed throughout the research process to protect the rights of the participants. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Chapter overview

This study aimed to understand the outcomes of U.S. study experiences for a group of U.S. educated students from the Republic of Georgia. The outcomes were explored in four domains: Personal Development, Intercultural Competence, Civic Engagement, and Career Development. The participants of the study were a purposely selected group of Georgian students, who have completed one or two-year academic programs at four-year universities in different parts of the U.S. either on an undergraduate or graduate level, and have returned to Georgia to employ their knowledge and skills.

The current chapter presents the findings of the study, organized under ten themes, which were identified while coding the data composed of interview transcripts and additional notes.

The ten themes fall under the four domains in the following manner: Within the domain of *Personal Development*, three major themes emerged: 1) individualism 2) self-confidence, and 3) self-efficacy. Within the domain of *Intercultural Competence*, the participants' responses generated the following three themes: 1) dismissing stereotypes and bonding with other cultures, 2) becoming more tolerant and less judgmental of differences, and 3) gaining an outsider's perspective on their own country. Under *Civic Engagement*, the findings revealed the study participants' 1) perceptions and attitudes about their roles as citizens of Georgia prior to U.S. experience and 2) changed perspectives and increased motivation to become more active citizens post U.S. experience. With respect to *Career Development*, the respondents shared about 1) skills and qualities gained in the U.S. and 2) leadership demonstrated post U.S. experience.

Finally, additional findings that do not fall under any of the four pre-set domains are presented.

## **Personal Development**

### Individualism

According to Hofstede (2001), “Individualists are autonomous and independent from their in-groups (family, tribe, nation, etc.); they give priority to their personal goals over the goals of their in-groups, and they behave primarily on the basis of their own attitudes rather than the norms of their in-groups” (p. 990). Thus, the defining principle of individualism is being independent and self-reliant.

The participants of this study unanimously pointed out that living independently while studying in the U.S., matured them personally and made them independent and self-reliant. (See Appendix A for the demographic characteristics of the participants). Lia described independence as having “freedom and ability to analyze situations and practice [her] own judgment.” Maya elaborated that when young people are plucked out from their own country, family environment, and comfort zone, and are then plopped into a foreign country with an unfamiliar setting, they cannot depend on anybody. “I relied on myself only while in the U.S.,” she said, “and when I found myself in puzzling situations, I was forced to think and take responsibility for my actions and find solutions. It was like being thrown into a swimming pool; I had to swim, otherwise I was going to drown; and the fact that I swam gave me an amazing sense of achievement.” Maya also described the effect that living and studying in the U.S. had on her personal development by stating that one year spent in the U.S. equaled about five years spent in her home country. “I grew so much through the experiences and challenges,” she said, “and above all, I got to know myself and my capabilities.”

Fifteen out of twenty people interviewed said going to the U.S. to study was the first time they had left their home, family, and friends. This is seldom an easy experience, but despite the difficulties, 90 percent of the participants (eighteen out of twenty), praised it as worthwhile, even

life-transforming. Nino voiced her opinion shared by most interviewed during this research that, “to realize your potential, to really find out who you are standing alone, without the support and comfort of your family and friends, you have to find a way to tear yourself out from your familiar surroundings and explore yourself in a setting that is unfamiliar and challenging.”

These responses are particularly meaningful and valuable given that in a Georgian society young adults, who are collectivist by nature, are not used to living independently. Often the decisions they make are based on parents’ or other family members’ opinions and the family members also serve as a strong support system when challenges arise. These practices coupled with a customary lifestyle, one would guess, do not provide room for the Georgian youth to mature personally and develop a strong sense of self during the young age. “I was twenty-five years old when I went to the U.S. for graduate school,” Natia shared, “but this was my first experience living alone, away from my parents, making my own decisions. I can say without exaggeration that that’s when I got to know myself.”

As I continued to encourage the respondents to share more examples of how their U.S. experiences affected their personalities, one of the most candid responses I got came from Maya, who told me, “You know what? I became egoistic, but in a good way.” Then she proceeded to explain that in a collectivistic culture, which is prevalent in Georgia, people are tricked to believe that if people around them, especially family and friends, are happy, they themselves don’t necessarily have to be happy. “But you know, down to the core, if you’re not happy as a person, you cannot make anybody else happy,” she added, “I had this revelation when I was in the U.S. and observed how people respected themselves, gave worth to their time, efforts, and achievements. I was inspired to value myself first and foremost because I realize now that only then I can be a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter, a good co-worker, and a good friend.”



## Self-confidence

Building on the premise of individualism and self-worth, several respondents pointed out that the U.S. experience boosted their self-confidence. “I was very shy, almost evasive, before I went to the U.S.,” contributed Lela, “I never initiated contact with anyone and had a pessimistic outlook on life, but I felt awakened by the energy and the busy lifestyle of my American peers. I wanted to change.” Nino said the U.S. experience helped her “come out of the shell” and “express opinions more freely, with confidence,” while Shorena and Khatia described the boost in self-esteem and social confidence as “exciting” and “surprising”, respectively. “People found it interesting that I was no longer an introvert when I returned to Georgia,” commented Lela and added that her family and friends were amazed that she had transformed into a “gregarious person, who would smile and say hello to strangers.” Nino observed similar a change in her character. “I became so much more open, less reserved and less awkward, socially,” she claimed and gave this example to illustrate her point: “Nowadays, if I’m sitting at a Georgian supra<sup>20</sup> close to someone I don’t know, I don’t wait for an introduction. I smile and say hello and introduce myself, and people think I’m crazy, but in a good way; this is what America gave me: freedom of expressing myself. I feel gracious...it’s a very liberating feeling.”

After hearing these reflections, I could not help but ask the respondents what they attributed the changes in their attitudes to. I wanted to understand their perceptions as to what factors might have facilitated the boost in their confidence.

“I believe that I opened up because the U.S. is a very comforting, welcoming place, where you feel like a respected person, even if you’re a foreigner and aren’t established as a professional yet,” explained Mari. Natalia contributed that she was “influenced by the environment [where] individuality and communicability are essential if you want to succeed.”

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<sup>20</sup> Supra is a traditional Georgian feast and an important part of the Georgian social culture.

Several other respondents shared this point of view and asserted that the changes might have stemmed from the need to “adapt to the environment” and “fit in with the peers.”

Tamuna came up with an original explanation of the relationship between U.S. experience and boost in her confidence; she claimed that becoming friends with people from different parts of the world and being able to interact with them made her feel “cool and worldly”. Ana concurred and said that having multicultural friends made her “a very rich person.”

### Self-efficacy

After immersing themselves in a new culture and experiencing the many highs and lows of being a foreigner, the sojourners collectively expressed that they returned home feeling empowered, taking justifiable pride in what they had achieved. “Wow, if I could do this that means I can do anything,” said Eka as she was reflecting on her experiences dealing with linguistic, academic, social, and cultural challenges during her time in the U.S.

The responses, which expressed the participants’ firm beliefs in achieving success in the future are grouped under the theme of *self-efficacy*.

*Self-efficacy* is the measure of the belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals (Ormrod, 2006). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Zhai, 2000). Bandura (2000) holds that the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through “mastery experiences during which people overcome challenges independently.” In turn, “success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy.” (p.4).

Indeed, seventeen out of twenty participants implied during the interviews that the challenges they were able to overcome during their time in the U.S. made them feel accomplished. “The energy, flexibility, and creativity I needed to put into everyday activities in

order to navigate through my new life made me feel like Hercules,” said Ia jokingly, “I came back feeling like there was no task I couldn’t handle,” she added. Others expressed that they returned to Georgia feeling optimistic about the future. “What America instilled in me is the belief that if I want to have a better life, I can achieve it as long as I am energetic and have the aim and the will; and that is a huge motivation,” articulated Natalia.

The message that also resonated in many of the respondents’ musings about the effects of U.S. study experiences was that they became driven and ambitious, whereas before they would typically go with the flow of life and see what happened. “The opportunities that unfolded...the new knowledge and skills I gained...helped me figure out what I wanted to achieve in life, and after I returned, I created a plan for the next ten years, which I’m strictly following,” shared Tamuna.

### **Intercultural Competence**

In this study, *Intercultural Competence* is conceptualized as the knowledge, behaviors, and skills necessary for someone to communicate appropriately and effectively with a person of another culture (Deardorff, 2004) and possessing the ability to understand and enjoy the complexities of intercultural interaction by respecting and appreciating different customs, values, beliefs, and lifestyles (Zhai, 2000).

Some scholars hold that becoming intercultural is a dynamic and complex process, which varies with each individual and with each context and situation. It takes a deliberate and willful determination to engage in and experience another culture, and to reflect on and be transformed by that experience. From this process, the individuals develop a growing intercultural identity by which they can negotiate in, learn from, and freely move between two or more differing cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003).

In addition, according to Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation, sojourners who have learned to look at the world from a different point of view tend to become inter-culturally competent as their perspective is becoming more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative. Transformation implies that the sojourner is, in some ways, not the same person following the learning process as before the process starts. "The sojourner's 'old' person breaks up, and the intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral capacities construct a 'new' person at a higher level of integration" (Kim & Ruben, 1988, p. 314 cited in Meade, 2010).

Very much in accord with the conclusions of the above scholars, the participants of my study commonly expressed that living in a multi-cultural environment helped them make discoveries and dismiss cultural stereotypes, become more tolerant and less judgmental of differences, and gain an outsider's perspective on their own country. Below is a more detailed account of the findings in this domain, sorted under the three themes that emerged during data analysis.

#### Dismissing stereotypes and bonding with other cultures

Fourteen out of twenty respondents (70 percent) noted that they hadn't had exposure to people of other nationalities prior to traveling to the U.S. and that they made their first foreign friends during their studies in the U.S. "Before I went to the U.S., I thought that no one was capable of the kind of friendships that we have here in Georgia," shared Miranda. "I was under the impression that people in the U.S. were selfish, careless, and unreliable," said Salome. Nine out of twenty participants brought up superficiality of relationships as a preconceived opinion about people of different cultures. "It was in my head that they didn't care too much about their families and friends," commented Irina, echoing the perception of several other participants of this study. These respondents pointed out, however, that this perception didn't hold true. "The loyalty of my Indian and Afghan friends in the U.S. was incomparable," commented Natalia. "I

found that we were very similar in terms of our core values,” added Dali about her American, Indian, and African friends. Sixteen out of twenty participants discovered that friendships and close ties to the family were just as important to their American, Turkish, Irish, Afghani, and African friends as they were to them. However, the experience that was shared by a large majority of respondents (eighteen out of twenty) was that they bonded more easily with people from African and Asian countries, than those who considered themselves American. “I think one of the reasons was that they [non-Americans] were more understanding and compassionate, and we had a lot of mutual feelings,” explained Natalia. Few others concurred and elaborated that when you meet someone who has had similar experiences as you (in this case, having left a home country and studying in a foreign language), “You link with them almost automatically because you already have something to talk about”, “It is easier to connect with them on the emotional level”, “You understand each others’ troubles”, and “You don’t feel like an outsider when you are with them.”

Some other stereotypes that the participants brought up during our conversations were the ideas that Americans don’t know much outside their country, and that “they are all wealthy and happy.” Several respondents remarked that what people don’t grasp about the U.S. without living there is how big and diverse the country is. “I realize now how silly it sounds if I make a statement beginning with ‘Americans are...’,” Maya remarked, “How can one say that?” she questioned, “It’s really not black and white; there are so many shades of grey.”

### Becoming more tolerant and less judgmental of differences

Nineteen out of twenty respondents commented that the exposure to different groups of people in the U.S. made them more open-minded and less judgmental. “I met the first gay person in the U.S.,” said Ia. “I made my first African American friend,” remarked Ketii. “My best friend wore a hijab,” shared Veriko, “Four of my best friends belonged to four different religions...we

would visit each others' places of worship and discuss the beliefs of our religions; [it was] an invaluable educational experience," contributed Lia. The participants described their interactions with different groups of people as "enlightening", "gratifying", and "mind-opening". "I came face to face with the reality that the person next to me was different from me...and I understood then that different means interesting, not wrong," elaborated Sopo. "I learned just one thing," shared Eka, "when it comes to relationships, if you find like-minded people, then the culture and religion don't matter." Other respondents asserted that they became "more inquisitive, more compassionate and less judgmental." Nona expounded that, "When your horizons widen, your mentality and your attitudes change accordingly." Others concurred and added that their mentality changed as a result of living in the U.S. because of the knowledge gained through firsthand, interactive experiences with people from different cultures. "I was able to see the world in America, especially because I lived near New York City," commented Natalia, "I didn't have to go any farther."

Nino was particularly insightful about the relationship between inter-cultural competence and the U.S. experiences. She supposed that "something almost magical happens to the Georgians who've lived overseas," implying that "they become more accepting and understanding of differences." Then she added that she wished every single person would leave Georgia and live abroad, especially in the U.S., at some point in their lives, then return to realize that "...to truly open your mind, you have to touch and feel other cultures; you have to let the outside world enter you."

Eight out of twenty participants mentioned that they developed a more liberal attitude towards sexual minorities while living in the U.S. "I had my first experience interacting with gay and lesbian people in the U.S.," shared Ia, "I realized how important it is to have personal choice in everything, and that nobody should be told how to live and who to love."

These remarks, coming from well-educated Georgian youth, are truly striking in light of the local context. The former Soviet Union, of which Georgia was a part, was a secluded place, and its citizens, fed by the Soviet propaganda, had virtually no exposure to the rest of the world for over seventy years. Furthermore, Georgia experienced an exceptionally harsh oppression of the national identity and native language during the Soviet regime ruled by Russia, and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, “Georgian people linked their hopes for a better future primarily with national renewal and the restoration of national identity, rooted in history and tradition” (Korth, 2005, p.3). It is only natural that the Georgian people would build up strong nationalistic sentiments post independence and develop a fear and distrust of outsiders. For this reason, the study participants’ comments about becoming tolerant of differences and accepting of the outside world, denote the birth of a new generation of Georgians, who have found ways to stamp out prejudice about other cultures while taking pride in and maintaining their own national identity.

#### Gaining an outsider’s view on own country

Study abroad experience is often deemed to have a transformative power for participants. This assertion is strongly supported by the findings of this study. According to Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory, “justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context – biographical, historical, cultural – in which they are embedded (Mezirow, p.4). It can be inferred then that a study-abroad experience provides a unique opportunity for participants to employ vigilant, mindful learning in a foreign environment and obtain an outsider’s view of oneself and one’s own country and culture (Langer, 1997). Mindful learning is defined as the “continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information, an implicit awareness of more than one perspective (Langer, 1997, p.4). Indeed, the third theme that emerged in the participants’ responses in the domain of *Intercultural Competence* was that their study abroad experiences reshaped their views on their

own country. “The best thing that happened to me was that I somehow emerged from Georgia, I came out of a deep hole, and I ended up on top of the world, from which I could look down on my own country and examine it in whole,” declared Lela and added that this opportunity helped her become more objective and reflective about her own country. Eleven out of twenty respondents commented on how this experience triggered them to think critically. “I started questioning things that were taught to me before,” shared Dali, “and I saw the events, past, present, and future, from different angles, and I could only do it because I was wearing the lens of an outsider,” she added. Several other respondents brought up the idea of questioning, researching, and digging deep. Lela commented on how the questions that her foreign friends asked her about the traditions, customs, history and current events of Georgia forced her to think hard and dig deep into her own country and culture. “I asked myself *why* questions,” she said, “I spent nights, no kidding, trying to come up with answers and explain things that I never had to question or explain before.”

Four participants also pointed out that living abroad let them “see the loopholes” and “understand what needs to change” in Georgia because “people who are abroad can better feel the pulse of the country” and because “the view you get when you’re in the country is very one-sided.”

### **Civic Engagement**

According to Ehrlich (2000) in *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, civic engagement means “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference” (p.6). Morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger society and, therefore, “considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own;



such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate” (p.9).

This definition of civic responsibility provided an excellent premise for evaluating the participants’ comments related to how their perceptions and attitudes had changed about their roles in the larger society as a result of observing and participating in various community service activities in the U.S.

#### Perceptions about citizens’ roles and responsibilities prior to U.S. experience

Eight out of twenty participants commented that prior to the U.S. experience, they did not believe that they had any leverage over anything that was happening (or not happening) in the country. “Before I went to the U.S., there was a mass disillusionment...I was thinking that there was nothing I could do,” contributed Maya. Veriko asserted that apathy was a natural sentiment post communism since people were used to the idea that everything was decided for them. “I didn’t feel that there was anything I could do, or should do, or that I owed the country, because you know, the country hadn’t been good to me, so I was like, why should I bother?”

Fourteen out of twenty participants commented that prior to their study abroad experience, they were not fully aware of what duties and responsibilities citizens have in a democratic civil society. “For the longest time, I thought that the government should give us everything that we want,” acknowledged Irina, and she added that this flawed perception changed largely as a result of studying abroad in a country where citizens “do their share of work.” “I think that in general we, Georgians, have a hard time realizing that we have a state, an independent country, and as citizens of such, we have roles and responsibilities, and that government officials, too, have responsibilities towards the citizens,” stated Natalia. The idea of citizens not doing their share of work in Georgia resonated in the comments of many respondents during the interviews, and they gave ample examples to illustrate their points. For example,

Khatia pointed out that, “You walk into the apartment buildings...the hallways are littered, the walls are scraped, the elevators are dirty, and then you walk into the apartments, and it all looks very neat and sometimes luxurious.” Building on the similar observation, another participant argued that what many people don’t understand in Georgia is that the common public place belongs to them and that they should take care of their surroundings. “They think that if it’s outside their door, it’s not their problem,” she remarked.

Nino recalled how surprised she was when she saw that people sorted waste in the U.S. “At first I thought to myself, how can anyone ask people in Georgia to recycle or to volunteer when there are so many social problems...but now I realize that these two processes are not mutually exclusive,” she said, “and above all, I realize that we don’t need a mayor to tell us that we should keep our streets clean and not litter.”

Other participants gave different examples to support their claims that an average Georgian citizen does not play her or his role in bettering the society and keeping the social order. For example, Dali of them pointed out that when people stand in line, “Nobody keeps the line; it’s very chaotic.” Interestingly, Maya expressed that the only time she felt she was doing something for the society was, when as a member of a scout organization, she and her fellow scouts were required to clean public spaces. “But we almost wanted to hide that we were doing it,” she professed, “It made us feel different from the mass of people, and feeling different was not a good thing back then. There were bullies who would call us conformist communists.” This story was shared to support the claim of several participants of this study that when it comes to civic engagement, “People do things only if they are commanded to do it, or if they are promised to be paid for it.”

Ia remarked that in Georgia people have a hard time understanding why anyone would engage in any type of community service for no reward. “The concepts of voluntary volunteerism and self-fulfillment are very foreign,” she claimed.

It is true that the participants’ comments discussed above do not directly relate to the question of how their U.S. experiences affected them. When the participants mused about how the U.S. experience has instilled in them a great desire and motivation to become active citizens and contribute to bettering their communities, I asked a follow-up question about what their perceptions and attitudes were before the U.S. experience, and more importantly how they perceived their roles and responsibilities as citizens of Georgia prior to the U.S. experience. Hence, the reflections on the civic culture in Georgia were largely elicited through my follow-up question about the issue that they had raised.

It should be noted that in fulfillment of the scholarship requirements within the Global UGRAD and Muskie programs, all of the participants in this study were engaged in various community service activities in the U.S. for at least one academic semester. Therefore, it was not surprising that 80 percent of the respondents noted that they returned to Georgia with the motivation to “act as agents of change” and become more engaged civically “even if it means bringing about change on a very small scale.”

#### Changed perceptions on citizens’ roles and responsibilities post U.S. experience

Thirteen out of twenty participants indicated that they returned to Georgia with specific knowledge about the ways in which citizens can participate in governing a country. Some of the ways mentioned in the responses other than voting in local and national elections, were: participating in political discussions, initiating and signing petitions, and writing letters to elected representatives. Natia shared that while studying political science for her graduate degree, she

learned that several parties can participate in the policy-making process in democratic countries. “I understood better how influential the NGOs and media can be in affecting change, but above all, I recognize that I, as an ordinary citizen, can have a say in how things turn out,” elaborated one participant.

One of the greatest ideas that was phrased in different ways by several respondents was the one of “becoming the change you want to be”, “being the agent of change”, and “becoming a role model of a good citizen. “

Maya shared a story of how she organized an anti-smoking rally in her city and recruited participants through a cause page she created on Facebook. “Even if it’s on grassroots level, even if it can reach only ten people, then those ten people will reach ten more, and that’s power, that’s how change comes about,” she posited. Other participants shared stories about getting together with a few friends and organizing food and clothes drives for various orphanages and elderly houses in their cities. “What’s important is that I don’t get involved in these kinds of things just to tell someone I did it; I’m doing it because I prove to myself that I have power and that I can serve my community,” contributed Salome. “[Community service] has to become a habit,” asserted Khatia. She also noted that her motivation to engage in charitable activities “definitely stemmed from the U.S. experience; otherwise, I may have gotten involved in something, but I wouldn’t have initiated it,” she specified.

“Volunteerism does not only mean giving and sharing,” contributed Lia, “it means everything that connects social and personal responsibility to human values and helps us to realize how much we can do for the positive change - change that can contribute to the peace and prosperity of our community.” She then shared that with other alumni of the U.S. exchange programs, she has initiated several activities to address the needs of underprivileged youth in

Bedliani village in Georgia, as well as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Tbilisi, Georgia. “It is through volunteerism that I have acquired leadership and interpersonal skills,” she noted.

Sopo made an interesting point with regard to engaging in charitable actions in order to give back to the community. “My friends in Georgia say they have their own grandparents to take care of,” she said, “but I think the big point here is helping someone who’s not related to you without getting any credit or recognition for it; it’s our personal duty to take care of our family members, but it’s a kind will and a civic duty to visit an orphanage or an elderly house,” she elaborated.

Maya stated that Georgia “owes the beginning of community service movements to the alumni of U.S. education programs.” Then she pointed out how important it is to have a network of like-minded people who understand the true value of community service and volunteering. “I’m hoping that we will inspire people to look for ways in which they can contribute to bettering our communities,” said Nona.

Several participants noted that after coming back from the U.S., they started working at various non-profit organizations and assumed the positions which enabled them to affect change in the society through their work agenda. For example, Tamuna shared how she manages several projects which are aimed at promoting middle and high school students’ participation in political decision-making processes. “My team and I teach them [middle and high school students in different regions of Georgia] how to identify problems in the society, come up with several ways in which the problems could be addressed, examine each proposed policy by discussing advantages and drawbacks, and determine which branch of the government should be approached for help,” she explained and added that 1,600 students had already participated in these types of projects under her leadership. Natia noted that after coming back from the U.S., she was seeking the type of job which would benefit her as well as others, so she also started

working at the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia on developing the education policy for children in extreme rural areas of Georgia, where there are no schools.

### **Career Development**

In this study, *Career Development* is understood as a process during which U.S. education program graduates are able to utilize the set of new skills acquired during the U.S. study period to pursue a desirable career or obtain a professional status/job offer after the experience.

Consequently, in the domain of *Career Development*, I sought to understand the effect that studying in the U.S. has had on the Georgian students' professional life. To this end, I inquired about the specific skills that the participants gained in the U.S., and the leadership positions they have held since their return to Georgia.

#### Skills and qualities gained in the U.S.

The participants unanimously pointed out that they gained professional work ethic while in the U.S., and that they learned how to manage time and resources better. "We can definitely learn a lot from Americans, especially organizational skills and management skills, which are lacking in Georgian workplaces," contributed Mari. Others added that they gained negotiation skills, analytical thinking skills, and problem solving skills and learned how to be diplomatic skills and learned how to be politically correct and express opinions without offending anyone. "I returned from the U.S. feeling confident that I could assume leadership positions in the areas of research, evaluation, and policy-making," stated Lela. "I was prepared to generate ideas, lead projects, and manage resources," said Ia. It should be noted that in fulfillment of their scholarship programs, all of the participants of the study had to complete a semester-long

professional internship in their fields of study, so the majority of the respondents attributed their newly acquired professional qualities to those work experiences during their stay in the U.S.

#### Leadership demonstrated post U.S. experience

Several participants expressed that there seems to be a general understanding on the Georgian job market that “the alumni of U.S. exchange programs are professionals, and they are “sought-out to be hired.” In consequence, fourteen out of twenty participants stated that they were able to find a job within six months of return from the U.S. As expected, the majority of these people (ten out of fourteen) were the alumni of the Muskie program, who had obtained a Master’s degree.

Several respondents shared that they had been hired as project managers by various leading international organizations such as World Vision International, Save the Children, United Nation’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Oxfam International, World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In addition, other participants reported on assuming leadership positions in the Georgian governmental organizations such as the State Chancellery, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Affairs of Georgia. For example, Natia shared that she is in charge of developing standards for evaluating school principles, developing policy for the operation of resource centers at schools and reviving board of trustees in her capacity at the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Nino reported on being hired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a diplomatic attaché at the Department of the Americas to overlook the U.S. foreign policy towards the Caucasus. Yet Mari reported on being hired by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Affairs of Georgia as the director of the Health Policy Department, advising the

minister on the national health strategy for 2011-2015. Lela and Ketik shared that they have pursued careers in the field of higher education and have been hired as chairs of the Department of Financial Services and the Department of Development and Foreign Relations at Ilia State University in Georgia. Maya shared that after managing projects at a U.K.-based organization Every Child, she was recruited by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) as a Senior Program Officer.

Natalia has become the director of Marketing and Advertising Department at the National Museum of Georgia, and Ia shared that after serving as Program Coordinator at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and founding “Eurasia Pharma Consulting”, a medical consulting company, she was offered a position of the director of Global Network of Fertility Clinics in Thailand and India.

As evidenced by the success stories shared by the participants of this study, it is safe to say that one of the most significant outcomes of U.S. study experiences is that it equipped the students with practical knowledge and valuable skills and qualities, which helped them attain successful careers in their fields of interest and expertise. “I can say without exaggeration that everything that I have achieved so far, and everything that I am, I owe to those opportunities I had while living and studying in the U.S.,” acknowledged Maya. As a concluding remark, Mari said that the U.S. experience has had only positive influence on her life. “I left my children here, my daughter was eleven, and my son was six while I was pursuing a Master’s degree in the U.S.,” she shared, “and it was a huge sacrifice and an extremely difficult decision to make, but if given another opportunity, I would again go for it.”



## **Additional Findings**

### Third Culture Kid Syndrome

*Third Culture Kid* (TCK, 3CK) is a term coined in the early 1950s by American sociologist and anthropologist Ruth Hill Useem to refer to "Children who accompany their parent's into another culture" (Useem, 1970). However, more recently, American sociologist David C. Pollock and his co-author Ruth Van Reken developed the following definition of the term:

“A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p.13).

Eighty percent of the participants of this study (sixteen out of twenty) reflected on the experiences and feelings they had while trying to readjust to their home country, which fit perfectly in the construct of the Third Culture Kid phenomenon. “When I was in the U.S., I was all Georgian; that’s what I identified as,” said Sopo, “but when I returned, I felt like a foreigner in my own country, in the city where I was born and where I grew up.” Eka contributed that she stood out among her Georgian friends who had not studied abroad. “Some of them were even calling me American, which didn’t make sense to me because in America I didn’t feel American at all; I call it confusion condition,” she elaborated, “I was really confused as to where I belonged.” Others concurred and posited that they felt out of place because their personalities, priorities, and viewpoints had changed quite a bit while being away, while their family members’ and local friends’ personalities, priorities, and viewpoints remained the same. “So in a way, I

became a global person,” expressed Natalia, “a global person without a home. I know it sounds pessimistic, but I mean it in a good way,” she explained.

“My boss used to say to me, ‘you are my favorite Georgian, because you’re so not Georgian’,” shared Maya. She said she identified herself as a native Georgian who had adopted so much of American culture that she could relate to people from both worlds. “I liked being hybrid,” she told me. In contrast, several other participants noted that being different was a challenge after coming back. “At work, people had a very laid-back attitude, poor work ethic, and they didn’t necessarily like that I was punctual, firm, and rigorous, and spoke English fluently; I was the odd one out, and I had a hard time because of that because I probably came across as arrogant and intimidating,” contributed Natia. Nona shared this view and concurred that being different caused annoyance, even aggression in some people because “they think that I’m showing off or that I’m superior to them, and they don’t like it.”

In agreement with the tendency of bonding with others of similar background, which stands at the heart of the *Third Culture Kid* phenomenon, several respondents stated that they sought out and made friends with people who shared similar experiences as them. “Most of the new friends I made after returning from the U.S. are the alumni of U.S. study programs,” said Veriko, “it seems that we think alike, and we face the same challenges that accompany the readjustment process, and these challenges bond us together.”

## Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study by conveying the perceptions and attitudes of Georgian graduates of U.S. study programs about the outcomes of their U.S. experiences. The major findings are that the participants believe the U.S. experience matured

them personally and intellectually. They praise being exposed to new ways of thinking and living, which, they believe, encouraged growth and independence. For many students, going to the U.S. to study was the first time they had been away from home, which was not an easy experience, but they unanimously praised it as worthwhile, even life-transforming. After immersing themselves in a new culture, mastering the challenges of learning in a new and different academic environment, and experiencing the many highs and lows of being a foreigner, students returned home feeling independent and empowered with increased self-confidence and justifiable pride in what they had achieved.

In addition, the study participants shared that living in a multicultural environment and personally interacting with people of different nationalities helped them stamp out prejudice against foreigners, broadened their horizons, and made them more open-minded and forbearing. The participants also expressed that living away from their home country and gaining an outsider's perspective taught them a great deal about themselves and their country.

Furthermore, the study participants expressed that observing the civil society at work in the U.S., and participating in various community service activities in their host communities motivated them to replicate this kind of lifestyle in Georgia, and as a result they started seeking ways in which they could bring about positive changes in their communities, even if these changes only affected a small group of people. To this end, the majority of participants reported that they pioneered and led several initiatives aimed at increasing people's awareness about citizens' rights and responsibilities and helping underprivileged groups of the society through charitable actions.

Other important findings of the study are that the skills, which the sojourners acquired in the U.S. in the rigorous academic setting and as a result of their professional internships, made

them competitive on the job market upon return and enabled them to assume leadership positions in various fields both in the non-governmental and governmental sectors.

Lastly, the finding that did not fall under any of the four pre-set domains concerned the experiences and feelings that are attributable to Third Culture Kid (TCK) syndrome. The participants unanimously pointed out they were confused as to which culture they belonged to; they felt like foreigners in their own country after they returned from the U.S., experienced fallout with Georgian friends who had never traveled abroad, and grouped with those people who shared similar experiences as them.

The subsequent chapter offers a more thorough discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical context and elaborates on the significance of the findings for various stakeholders such as the U.S. government and society, the Georgian government and society, and study abroad program administrators.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION**

### **Chapter overview**

Why do these findings matter? What theoretical and practical implications do they have? Who will benefit from the new knowledge created as a result of this research? These are the questions addressed in this chapter.

First, I discuss how the findings relate to Jack Mezirow's and David Kolb's theoretical assumptions about transformational and experiential learning during adulthood, and then I explain the significance of the findings for various stakeholders such as the U.S. as the host country, Georgia as the sending country, and study abroad program administrators. Finally, I provide recommendations for further research in the area of U.S. education outcomes for students from former Soviet countries.

### **Relating Findings to Theoretical Assumptions**

The major findings of this research are in great accord with the theoretical assumptions of Jack Mezirow and David Kolb about transformational and experiential learning processes during adulthood.

Generally, "transformative learning" is a term used in educational theory to describe a process which leads the learner to re-evaluate past beliefs and experiences; it refers to the "process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

At the core of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory is the process of "perspective transformation", with three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of

the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle) (Mezirow, 2000).

Indeed, the participants of the study expressed that they experienced transformation in all of these three dimensions. First, the majority of the respondents (eighteen out of twenty), pointed out that the U.S. experience matured them personally and intellectually and that the new ways of thinking and living encouraged their growth and independence. For many students, going to the U.S. to study was the first time they had been away from home, which was not an easy experience, but they unanimously praised it as worthwhile, even life-transforming. After immersing themselves in a new culture, mastering the challenges of learning in a new and challenging academic environment, and experiencing the many highs and lows of being a foreigner, the graduates learned a great deal about themselves. During the interviews, they unanimously inferred that this unique experience helped them rediscover and redefine themselves and that they gained a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and realized their full potential. They indeed, returned home with a transformed understanding of selves; with increased self-confidence, justifiable pride in what they had achieved, and a strong motivation to continue thriving and succeed in the future. Therefore, these changes perfectly fit in the psychological dimension of perspective transformation.

Second, the study participants shared that living and studying in the U.S. pushed them to get out of their comfort zones to experience another culture, language, environment, and education system. They commonly expressed that this experience taught them to appreciate difference and diversity firsthand, and enabled them to recognize — and then dismiss — stereotypes they had held about people they had never met. They described the experience of personal interactions with people of different nationalities as eye-opening and invaluable. The participants also expressed that living away from their home country naturally brought about

change in their frames of reference by forcing them to critically reflect on their prior knowledge and consciously transform their attitudes and actions.

Given these findings, it can be inferred that the U.S. experience provided a unique opportunity for participants to employ vigilant, mindful learning in a foreign environment and obtain an outsider's view of oneself and one's own country and culture. Mindful learning is defined by Langer (1997) as the "continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information, an implicit awareness of more than one perspective (p.4). Furthermore, the fact that the participants of the study had these life-transforming experiences during adulthood, makes the findings of the study even more relatable to Mezirow's assumptions. He suggests that we make meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding in adulthood, for we more clearly understand our experience when we know under what conditions an expressed ideal is true or justified. He further explains that "interpretations and opinions that may have worked for us as children often do not as adults" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). Interestingly, several respondents made comments during the interviews about having these experiences during adulthood. "I always thought that people are moldable at a younger age, during high school years, so I didn't realize that I could make tangible changes in my personality, attitude, and values in my late 20s," said one participant. Others commented on the benefit of having such an experience during adulthood and expressed that had they been younger and less mature, they may not have been able to "appreciate the diversity", "understand the true value of [cross-cultural] communication", and "take full advantage of the opportunities".

These particular findings are strongly related to the convictional dimension of the Transformative Learning Theory, which assumes revisions in the belief systems.

Lastly, we have the behavioral dimension, supposing changes in the participants' habits and lifestyles as a result of the transformative learning experience. Quite aptly, study participants

expressed that observing the civil society at work in the U.S. and participating in various community service activities in their host communities motivated them to replicate this kind of lifestyle in Georgia, and as a result, they started seeking ways in which they could bring about positive changes, even if on a small scale. To this end, the majority of participants reported that they developed new habits and took actions; they initiated and led several initiatives aimed at increasing people's awareness about citizens' rights and responsibilities in a democracy and designed and implemented projects aimed at helping the underprivileged groups of the society.

In short, these findings illustrate how the participants have learned to negotiate and act on their own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings to gain greater control over their lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers. Furthermore, this has particular relevance for learning in contemporary societies that share democratic values, as democracies inherently create opportunities for self-transformation. "Where individuals are more broadly empowered, especially in the institutions that have most impact on their everyday lives (schools, workplaces, etc.), their experiences would have transformative effects: they would become more public spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the interests of others, and more probing of their own interests" (Warren, 1992, p. 28).

The findings of the study are equally pertinent to David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which explains that meaningful learning occurs in four stages: first, individuals have concrete experiences and they then reflect on these experiences. Later, these reflections are translated into concepts, which in turn are used as guides for active experimentation and the choice of new actions (Kolb, 1984).

With regards to the findings of the present study, we would then imagine that the first stage, *concrete experience*, is where the Georgian students (learners) lived in American communities and studied at American universities. The second stage, *reflective observation*,



would be when the learners consciously reflected back on that experience during my conversations with them. The third stage, *abstract conceptualization*, would be where the learners critically analyzed past beliefs and dispositions and formed new opinions, taking on new roles and assuming new identities. The fourth stage, *active experimentation*, would be where the learners plan (or the way they have planned) forthcoming experiences, i.e. their future endeavors.

Clearly, a close connection between the two theories and my research findings are implied above. However, the purpose of this research was not to test these theories, but rather to gather the data that would either generate new theories or generate findings that would uphold these theories. In other words, even though I was aware of the theoretical assumptions that a learning experience in a new and challenging environment forces the learners to question prior knowledge, critically analyze their belief systems, and formulate new opinions and attitudes, I did not go about the research by asking the participants specific questions about the extent to which they started questioning prior knowledge and critically analyzing their belief systems; instead, I asked them to reflect back on their U.S. experiences and share their perceptions about the changes that had observed, or the experiences that have has the most meaning to them. It happened so that the majority of the responses turned out to be the attestations of the conjectures described in the selected theories.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study have special significance for U.S. study program administrators and international education program administrators in general, the governments and societies of the sending and host countries: Georgia and the U.S., respectively, and individuals from the former Soviet countries and elsewhere, who are considering studying abroad, especially in the U.S.

### Significance for U.S. study program administrators

Firstly, the findings of this study imply that the efforts and contributions of the international program staff, as well as the funds and other resources spent to conduct U.S. study programs are justified given the life-transforming experiences that the participants have during their journeys. Although the scope and scale of this research was rather small, the findings serve as evidence that studying in the U.S. is beneficial for Georgian students, and U.S. study program administrators can refer to the empirical data to learn about the concrete outcomes of their efforts.

### Significance for Georgia as the sending country

Secondly, the findings are significant for the Georgian government and the society at large. With a recent history of authoritarian and corrupt regime, the value of an active civil society composed of young, worldly citizens with international experience, language capabilities, and cross-cultural communication skills, who assume responsibility for their governments and support democratic institutions, cannot be overstated. The role of social capital in transitional societies is decisive (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993) as communities with higher levels of social capital are thought to be able to cooperate more often to overcome social problems, keep their governments more responsive and more honest, and improve democratic institutional performance (Dowley and Silver, 2003). The present research shows that studying in the U.S. intellectually matures young citizens and promotes their self-efficacy, a belief and trust in their ability to influence change. What's more, the alumni of U.S. study programs have a ripple effect when it comes to affecting change. "It's like when you mix a small portion of chemical agent in a bowl of water, and it causes a reaction. It's that kind of chemistry that's going on here [in Georgia] with the help of U.S. educated people. We are the change agents; we see things

differently; we are able to identify problems and come up with solutions, and that's how change comes about," shared Natia during this research.

Additionally, a pool of broad-minded, skillful individuals is imperative for a transitional economy like Georgia, where the switch from a planned, government-controlled economic system to a Western style market economy has revealed a palpable shortage of qualified leaders who understand the principles of democracy and global economy and can demonstrate leadership to move the country forward.

What is also of utmost significance is the fact that the changes that U.S. study program participants experience seem to affect generations. "The way I raise my children is different because I was in the U.S.," commented Maya, "I want them to have the same values that I have, which are not necessarily reflected in the other children that they interact with. I encourage them to be inquisitive learners, and I want them to be exposed to diversity, to see all the colors in this world." Indeed, the U.S. study program graduates become the best teachers and role models for the next generation. They inspire hard work, resilience, and a positive attitude. "My children took a huge sacrifice for my education," shared Mari, "so I hope that as they grow up, they will realize that it's for them also that I did it, and everything that we have now is because I did that [studied in the U.S.], and if they have to take time and do something for their family and their community in the future, they can, because their mother did."

Thus, the benefits to the democratic processes in Georgia and the Georgian civil society in general are quite indisputable. It is perhaps also safe to assume that the findings of this research will positively influence those who are skeptical or unsure about the benefits of U.S. education.

### Significance for the U.S. as the host country

What do these findings mean for the U.S. as the host country? Why should it continue to invest in the U.S. study programs for students from the former Soviet countries and elsewhere? Given that the sojourners (at least the ones interviewed for this research) have all returned home after receiving higher education in the U.S., one might hold that the investment from the U.S. side would be reasonable only if these educated foreign professionals stayed in the U.S. after graduation, joined the workforce and benefited the U.S. economy. The truth is, however, that the U.S. can still benefit from the graduates of U.S. universities who return to their home countries as they, evidently, take with them a lasting, positive impression on the core aspects of America's values, i.e. individual expression, freedom of speech and thought, diversity, opportunity, and merit-based society.

The U.S. cultural exchange programs, particularly those programs with ties to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the United States Department of State, seek to develop cultural understanding between United States citizens and citizens of other countries, and so these programs represent valuable tools for exporting the American values mentioned above to different countries and spreading power by soft means, rather than through coercion and military might. In other words, these kinds of programs can be regarded as a great means for fostering cultural diplomacy.

The website of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy features a concise definition of this term: "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding." In 2003 Helena K. Finn, a senior American diplomat, argued that "cultural diplomacy is one of the most potent weapons in the United States' armory, yet its importance has been consistently downplayed in favor of dramatic displays of military might" (Finn, 2003, p.15).

Post WWII and in the midst of the Cold War, the U.S. increased its focus on cultural exchange with the Soviet countries and the rest of the world, fueled by a fear of the opposing world power (Bu, 1999). Cultural diplomacy was implemented via educational exchange, which eventually led to complete diplomatic exchange through politics and economics. The role of these cultural exchanges cannot be overstated for building bridges of understanding between the two worlds. I grew up in the former Soviet republic of Georgia during 1980s and 90s, and from what I have witnessed and what I have learned through the stories told by my parents and grandparents, I can testify that the Soviet ignorance of the United States was abysmal; isolated from the outside world and continually told by the Soviet media and the government of all the achievements of the Soviet state, we were convinced that we were far better off than those who lived in the capitalist West, that and in fact, those in the capitalist West, lived in misery and despair, brought about by the highly competitive and unfair system of governance. It is hard to imagine how distant we once were from each other, and the findings of this study show that through personal interactions and experiencing each others' cultures firsthand, we have gained a deep understanding and appreciation for each other. What's more, as evidenced by the testimonials of the participants of this research, graduates of U.S. study programs return home with a great potential to become future leaders in their countries, which in turn can have positive implications for the U.S. foreign policy. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell said in 2001: "I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here."

I believe that the U.S. should continue to invest in reaching global understanding and resolution through cultural diplomacy and engage and re-engage different regions of the world through "soft power." Joseph Nye, the Harvard Kennedy School Professor, who coined the expression, defines the term as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than

coercion or payments” (Nye, 2004, p.6). Educational exchanges, I believe, are excellent means for generating such attraction. Nye also holds that American higher education produces significant soft power for the United States as the “colleges and universities can help raise the level of discussion and advance American foreign policy by cultivating a better understanding of power...[and] instill in our students and in broader public a better appreciation of both the realities of our interconnected global society and the conceptual framework that must be understood to successfully navigate the new landscape we face” (Nye, 2005, p.14).

Therefore, policymakers today should not underestimate the value of engagement with foreign audiences and consider cultural diplomacy vital to U.S. national security.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

For future research, I would propose conducting (i) a similar study of U.S. education outcomes for male students from the Republic of Georgia, and (ii) a comparative study of undergraduate and graduate students’ experiences on U.S. college/university campuses.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explained how the findings of my research relate to Jack Mezirow’s and David Kolb’s theoretical assumptions on transformational and experiential learning processes during adulthood. I then explained that the findings of the research may appeal to several stakeholders, such as study abroad administrators, the U.S. government and society, the Georgian government and society, and those individuals who are considering studying in the U.S. in the future. I explained that although the scope and scale of this research was rather limited, the findings serve as evidence that studying in the U.S. is beneficial for Georgian

students, and U.S. study program administrators can refer to the empirical data to learn about the concrete outcomes of their efforts.

I also asserted that a pool of resilient and open-minded young people equipped with academic and professional skills essential for success in 21<sup>st</sup> century, is invaluable for an emerging democracy like Georgia since these U.S. – educated individuals possess the vision, leadership skills, and motivation to bring about positive changes in their communities and have a potential to become the future leaders in their societies.

Following, I discussed how the U.S. – as the host country – benefits from the graduates of U.S. universities after they return home. I suggested that through education and cultural exchange programs, the U.S. is able to export some of the most exalted American values: individual expression, freedom of speech and thought, diversity, opportunity, and merit-based society, and by doing so, it practices cultural diplomacy, which in turn allows the U.S. to secure friendships with foreign audiences and reach global understanding and resolution.

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### Appendix A: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	Pseudonym	Gender	Length of Study in the US	Level of Study
<b>1</b>	Nino	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>2</b>	Tamuna	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>3</b>	Eka	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>4</b>	Natia	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>5</b>	Lia	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>6</b>	Lela	Female	3 academic years	Undergraduate + Graduate
<b>7</b>	Natalia	Female	3 academic years	Undergraduate + Graduate
<b>8</b>	Maya	Female	3 academic years	Undergraduate + Graduate
<b>9</b>	Ia	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>10</b>	Mari	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>11</b>	Miranda	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>12</b>	Salome	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>13</b>	Keti	Female	3 academic years	Undergraduate + Graduate
<b>14</b>	Shorena	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>15</b>	Khatia	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>16</b>	Sopo	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>17</b>	Irina	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>18</b>	Dali	Female	2 academic years	Graduate
<b>19</b>	Nona	Female	1 academic year	Undergraduate
<b>20</b>	Veriko	Female	2 academic years	Graduate

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The central question to each of the participants is the following: “*Looking back over your U.S. study experience, how do you think it has affected your life?*” The domains will be mentioned in an open-ended manner. “You can tell me about the changes you have experienced in your personality, beliefs, attitudes, skills, civic engagement, and career, or you may tell me about other consequences that have importance to you and are related to something entirely different.”

The goal is to understand: how the participants:

- a. How the participants perceive the gains of their educational and cultural experiences in the United States?
- b. How the participants perceive the changes in their personal qualities, attitudes toward cultural diversity, dispositions about their civic responsibilities and career aspirations as a result of living and studying in the United States?
- c. What aspects of the study-abroad experience do the participants believe accounted for these changes most and in what ways?
- d. How have the participants used your knowledge and skills gained through the U.S. experience in their future endeavors?

Prior to asking questions pertinent to these specific themes, the interviewees will be asked to answer few initial, background questions such as:

- *When did you participate in the Global UGRAD/Muskie program?*
- *What college/university did you study at and for how long?*
- *What was your motivation for studying and living in the U.S.?*
- *Any previous international experiences?*

If necessary, (in the case where the participant gives a very brief answer to the central question and does not elaborate), the following prompting questions were used:

**Personal Growth/Personal Development**

- *How would you have described yourself prior to your U.S. experience? (i.e., introvert/extrovert, cautious/a risk-taker, level of independence, self-confidence, flexibility, adaptability)?*
- *What were your experiences with your American peers while abroad? In what ways were they similar/different from your Georgian friends at home?*
- *What changes, if any, have you observed in your personality after your return to Georgia?*
- *Have you discovered new qualities, abilities, strengths and weaknesses about yourself?*
- *What do you think has most influenced these changes in your personality?*

**Intercultural Competence**

- *How would you describe your level of empathy and/or understanding toward cultural and religious differences prior to participating in the program? Would you say that you had some pre-conceived notions/stereotypes about certain groups of people?*
- *In your opinion, what has most influenced your feelings toward people of other cultures?*
- *In what ways has the experience in the U.S. impacted your levels of cultural understanding, if at all?*

**Civic Engagement**

- *What is your current level of civic involvement? For example, can you tell me a little bit about the community service activities you have participated in prior to participating in the program and after your return from the U.S.?*
- *What has most influenced this involvement?*
- *In what ways has your experience in the U.S. influenced your community involvement?*

**Career Path**

- *How do you perceive the knowledge and skills gained from your U.S. study experience to have helped you in forming your career?*

Any other ways that studying and living in the United States has affected you?



## **Appendix C: Sample Interview Transcript**

**Tell me a little bit about why you decided to study in the United States.**

Well, the motivations were quite different for UGRAD and MUSKIE programs. During UGRAD, I was studying in Georgia and I thought that I was wasting my time. I was not happy at all with the way I was taught. It was really a matter of I want to learn more and I want to go back to the U.S. and have some fun and experience being a student there again. With MUSKIE, I was at a different place in life; I had children, I had been working, so it was kind of like a necessity because I felt like all of my friends already had MA degrees while I was raising children, so I thought that I was running out of time, and also I felt like since I changed my major (BA in English translation), then started working in PR, I was doing a lot of things, trying to find solutions by myself without having any theoretical knowledge base, so I thought that I needed to get some kind of an academic background in PR.

**I see. Great. So looking back over your U.S. study experiences both on the undergraduate and graduate levels, how do you think they have affected your life? You can tell me about the changes you have experienced in your personality, beliefs, attitudes, skills, civic engagement, and career, or you may tell me about other consequences that have importance to you and are related to something entirely different.**

Overall, I think all through my life I've had very low self-esteem, and I thought it was even lower at that time. It was completely unjustified because at that time only a handful of Georgian people had been abroad (studied abroad) and come back, so I think I stood out as it was. That made me feel very different, and very uncomfortable and very insecure, because my English was better than most people I knew. I had experienced things that others hadn't in terms of studying in the U.S., so I felt very different, and I felt that I had a potential for more. I felt very lucky to be selected to participate in this program. It was fully funded, and all I had to do was study and do community service and an internship whereas most American students get to pay for their education and have to juggle work and studies most of the time.

### **So being different made you feel insecure?**

Yes, because now I think you have a critical mass of people who have gone and come back. There are people like you. Then, I could only relate to the alumni of the program, who had had similar experiences, so in a way I got detached from my Georgian friends and felt like I could not relate to them anymore.

The not so good thing about UGRAD was that I was sent there together with a Georgian girl, and of course, we became roommates. It was very comfortable, but I ended up mostly interacting with her, so I didn't really get any American friends when I was there as a UGRAD student, so I don't really remember anybody that clearly. From most of the friends I made during my UGRAD year were UGRAD students from other NIS countries.

I didn't have a single American friend, which is kind of sad. I still keep in touch with the friends I made through my high school exchange program and from my graduate studies, but not from UGRAD. Everybody I met though was very nice. Again it was south, I was in Mississippi, where people in general are very cordial and supportive, and I felt very nice about that because in Georgia put a lot of emphasis on manners and courtesy, like men opening the doors for women etc., so you got all that in Mississippi, which was cool. But a big shock for me was the black community because as you know, we have zero interaction with black people in Georgia, and there I was in Mississippi, where people spoke with a different accent, there was slang...it was all mesmerizing to me. Also, they had some cowboys, which was also very interesting to me because I had seen Clint Eastwood type of westerns on TV, so there, I was like, wow, it's real...you know the whole hat and buckle thing, so I think I was very interested in people because they were very stereotypical in a good way. All the American things that we've seen through movies, through music, so I was like, wow! This is not exaggerated; this is really happening.

**Can you tell me about some of the stereotypes about American people and/or lifestyle that you had before you went to the U.S. and whether or not they held true?**

One stereotype was that Americans don't know much outside their country. Also that they are all wealthy and have a good life, and everybody's happy.

**...And? Was it like that?**

To some extent, yes. I think personally stereotypes aren't something that come out of the blue. I think there's so much truth to them, always. The problem with stereotypes is when people try to apply them to everybody, without discrimination. I think there are people to whom these stereotypes don't apply. I mean, of course, there are ignorant people everywhere, not just the U.S. There are people who are wealthy and happy, all that...everywhere. The thing that people don't grasp about U.S. without being there is how big and diverse it is, so I think if you've only been to one place, it doesn't reflect the country. So I think that's the biggest revelation that applies to everything; that the U.S. is huge, and it's diverse, and there are people of all sorts and kinds, and you can't really put a finger on what Americans are like.

**So that was your revelation in terms of culture then...**

Yeah, but it applies to everything in life. You know, you can't really say it's black and white, there are so many shades of grey, and I think that was the mind-opener to me when I went to the U.S. that there are so many colors, you can't really say this is black and that is white.

**That's true...**

But to go back to your question about how the U.S. experience has affected my life...I think that without exaggeration, and this is not the first time I'm saying this, everything that I have achieved so far, and everything that I am, I owe to those opportunities I had for living and studying in the U.S. Very roughly speaking, I think it always depends on the type of material, and I've always been a good material, a good candidate for those kinds of programs. I'm

perceptive to change, you know, I think I was smart back then, so you know, that's the type of person you can take and mold, so I think everything that I have, my jobs, my education, the type of person I have become is because of those opportunities.

Personality-wise, I mean, everything...from time management to how you manage your life, what you think you take for granted, you know, positive thinking, believing in yourself, believing that if you try hard, you'll be able to achieve what you really want, also being egoistic in a good way.

I think we have a very collective culture here where you know, like, if everybody else is happy, I don't necessarily have to be happy...but you know, down to the core, if you're not happy as a person, you cannot make anybody else happy, so I think that's another thing that the U.S. has boosted in me. I feel like I value my health, emotional and mental, telling myself that I have to be strong and happy as a person first of all, you know, to be a good mother, good co-worker, good friend.

Also, attitude towards money and time. You know the mentality that my time is valuable and if I do something, I expect to be rewarded, or if I borrow money from my sister, so what that it's my sister? I have to pay her back. So all that sense of, you know, fairness. Also, being open...for example, I met the first gay person in the U.S., I also met the first person who had AIDS, and you know all those [taboo] things. We always pride ourselves here in Georgia that we're very diverse, but I think it's debatable.

I think there are a lot of things that are not out in the open and there are a lot of undercurrents, just like in the U.S., I mean, not everything is smooth, but it's more open. You get to meet all sorts of people. And I think the problems emerge, like you know the glass ceiling, emerges on a deeper level. In the U.S. you meet so many different kinds of people, and that opens your mind, and from then on, you don't judge people that much. You're more compassionate, and you're just overall open to whatever might come.

Also the experience of adjusting to a different culture and then readjusting back to yours after coming back, while still retaining the new knowledge, skills, perspectives you have gained

from that experience, matures you as a person and gives you an amazing sense of achievement, and then you think, wow, if I could do this, that means I can do anything. You realize that you are capable of adjusting and succeeding in a hostile, in a different environment.

**That was great. I was hoping you'd elaborate and give examples, and you did.**

Another thing was, I started questioning everything. I started questioning things that were taught to me before, like I started thinking, is Georgia truly the best country, is it THE ultimate country that I was always taught to believe? And I think questioning is healthy, and the sooner you do it, the better, but it's also a very painful process.

**So would you say that you didn't do as much questioning when you lived in Georgia?**

I think I was in a state of self-denial when I was here, and all the questioning I did was very subtle and subconscious. I grew up during a very difficult time in Georgia, during the fall of the Soviet era and during the Civil War. I remember being in line and reading Remark's "Three Friends" about war, and I was thinking, oh my God, I can actually hear the bullets and I'm reading about WWII, so you know, I questioned things, but I was terrified at the same time, and on top of that I was a teenager with a bucket load of problems.

I got used to the reality, and I had my parents that I depended and counted on. But when you are plucked out and put in a different setting and you're on your own, you cannot depend on anybody, you rely on yourself only, so when you end up in puzzling situations, which happened all the time, you are forced to think and to take responsibility for your actions and find solutions. It's like putting someone in the pool and saying, "Swim, or drown." So I think we all swam, but it wasn't all that easy.

I always say that for me 1 year spent in the U.S. equals about 5 years spent here, in terms of everything because I experienced so much there. And also, I came back I felt that time was passing very slowly in Georgia. Nothing seemed to have changed in that one year, the people

were the same, while I had changed so much, and I had experienced so much in that one year.

I had an interesting experience during my graduate studies while I was working on my master's thesis. I was writing about the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia, and I discovered books that were written about it, in English! About why and how it happened, what was behind it etc. and I wondered if anyone in Georgia knew there were published books about Rose Revolution, and I remember gasping and thinking, "Oh, I think the U.S. was behind it." And here I was reading about how much was spent on what, and I'm like, oh my God.

I think there was so much propaganda in the local setting, the news are angled so much that when you are away you look at Georgia more realistically and more objectively, and you see things that you were not allowed to see before or maybe just didn't notice before, and you do miss good things, but you start to value them more. The things I used to take for granted, I started valuing them.

**So you're saying you got information from those textbooks that you didn't know about Rose Revolution?**

Yeah! Like I told you, I mean the whole budget...how much the revolution cost...who was involved from the U.S. Department of State. And it wasn't some conspiracy theory or anything, it was a book about democracy in Georgia, and it was openly stated that this was how democracy came to be in Georgia. We had the Rose Revolution supported by the U.S., I was like ::gasps loudly:: oh my God! You know...it was mind-bugling to be on the other side all of a sudden, looking at your own country through the microscope.

**I'm glad you raised the issue of democracy building in Georgia and the civil society in it. What was your understanding of a democratic civil society before you went to the U.S.? And has that perception changed at all since your return?**

I think before I went to the U.S., there was a mass disillusionment, and what you call apathy, where it's like, there's nothing I can do, which was a natural attitude post communism, where everything was decided for you and you had zero say in anything, so I didn't feel that there was anything that I could do, or should do, or that I owed the country, because you know, the country hadn't been good to me, so I was like, why should I bother?

However, I was a member of a scout organization, and I remember when we went camping, we had to leave the place cleaner than it was when we got there. So I did feel that on a very micro level, I was doing things, but it made us feel different, and feeling different was not a good thing back then. For example, we, as scouts, would be conscious of putting garbage in the trash bin, but we didn't do it openly, we almost wanted to hide that we were doing it, because that made us different from everyone else, and it made everyone else look bad. We didn't want to be better than everybody. There was a very mass mentality.

After coming back to the U.S. I did become more active as a citizen. I didn't even think about not voting in the elections, especially after the Rose Revolution, I was very excited because the new president was young and motivated and educated and spoke English, and of course, I voted for him, and I'd vote for him again because I don't see another viable candidate, which is really sad actually. However, it doesn't mean that I agree with and like everything that he does. I think we're going in the right direction, but I think the monitoring and evaluation has to be less lenient because I think there are problems, a lot of problems, which are being overlooked or hushed up.

I discovered that you have to set an example as a person. There's not much that I can do, but through the social media like Facebook, through my previous job at the UN, I worked for the World Health Organization, I quit smoking two years ago, so it is very personal for me, and on the World Tobacco Day last year, I volunteered to create a Facebook group in support of stopping tobacco consumption in Georgia.

So I was arbitrating myself as a person through a network of friends, so I realized, even if it's on grassroots, even if it can reach only 10 people, then those 10 people will reach 10 more, and that's power, that's how change comes about. You don't have to have a campaign or a big promotion. It can be done on a very small scale.

**I see. That's a great example. And I bet that made you feel empowered.**

Yes! And for the first time, not embarrassed about doing the right thing. I think I've stopped caring about what other people think about when I do something that I think is right but is not necessarily what the mainstream does. Now if I do something, I take a stance. Not in a rude way, but if I think something is right, I stand up for it.

**Interesting. Thanks for all of your thoughtful insights. What do you do now in your professional life?**

For the past six months, I've been working for the UK-based international NGO Every Child. They're working in the child welfare area, and I'm managing a European Union funded project, which concerns advocacy to protect children's rights. That's what I do now.

**Ok. Great. Can you think back to when you had just returned from the U.S. and were looking for a job? What was it like? Was it easy to find a job? Did you feel like you had special skills that gave you an edge over other candidates?**

Finding a job was easy at that time because I possessed very unique skills: I spoke English, and I could type, fast. Only a handful people could that in Georgia at that time. I later started working as a translator, and that skill, especially the level of language proficiency required for translation, I definitely gained during my studies in the U.S.

After UGRAD, I worked at the State Chancellery in the International Relations Department during Shevardnadze's time. I did some translating there too. Then my real, real job was in the USAID-funded project. My boss was American. And they loved me immediately at that



place because I spoke English well, which was not common at that time. My boss used to say to me, “You are my favorite Georgian, because you’re so not Georgian.” I liked being hybrid. There I was a native Georgian who had adopted so much of American that I could relate to people from both worlds. My American boss loved me because it was difficult to find a Georgian back then who had good work ethic, was punctual and all those other things. Then after MUSKIE, because I had a master’s degree in Public Relations, which not many people had in Georgia, it also helped me. There’s a general understanding here that the alumni of U.S. exchange programs are professionals, and they are sought-out. There is faith in them, and companies want to hire them.

**Ok. It’s interesting how you said that being hybrid, as you called it, a Georgian who has picked up quite a lot from America, is both good and bad. How so?**

I think it’s good because it makes me a very rich person. Speaking of low self-esteem, knowing about how many good friends I have from different countries makes me think I can’t be that bad if, you know, he or she wants to be my friend because they’re so awesome. So like I said, it makes me a very rich person that I know so many people from different walks of life and of different nationalities, that I have had so many different experiences. These experiences make me who I am.

The bad thing is that adjusting back and forth is very difficult, and you can’t be both, you really can’t. And the way I raise my children is different because I was in the U.S. I want them to have the same values that I have, which are not necessarily reflected in the other children that they interact with. So I think I’m making life a little harder for them as well. I hope it pays off in the long run. And also in terms of my relationships, I mean, I’m divorced, and I’m not blaming it on that, but it was just the type of person I was. I was not a typical Georgian wife because of the way I had become after living in the U.S. I’m not a typical sister, a typical daughter, not in a bad way, but I say that as an acknowledgement, because I was there.

**So what are some of the things that you are advocating with your kids, and how old are they?**

I have two girls. One is ten, and another is eight. And before I go there, I wanted to tell you I have a Syrian friend, who also studied in the U.S. for one year through the MUSKIE program, and I often think about how my situation is nothing compared to what she has to go through, and a friend from Belarus. I often emphasize how different Georgia is from the U.S., imagine Syria vs. U.S., or Belarus vs. U.S. To them, I think it's a nightmare because they go back to a very different reality and re-adjusting must be very hard for them.

With the kids, what I emphasize is their responsibilities, and how they are accountable for their actions, and how it's a give and take. I ask them questions, I never tell them anything. We debate things. I usually tell them, "This is what I want you to do, this is why I want you to do it, do you want to do it?" And if not, these are the reasons why I think you should still do it, you know? There's always a dialog.

I encourage them to think about the big picture when they think about their future and not limit them to what's in Georgia. I want them to think about all the opportunities that are out there in the world. They're very good kids, and I always tell them that they're not competing only against their peers here, but they're competing against other children their age in the world.

I want them to think of themselves as the citizens of the world. I want them to think big. I want them to be the change they want to see in the world. The children were here in Georgia with my mom while I was doing my master's for 2 years in the U.S., so they've already taken a big sacrifice for my education. Even though I came back during each break during the school year, it was still very hard for them. So I hope that as they grow up it's for them also that I did it, and everything that we have now is because I did that. And I don't have to spell it out for them.

Kids are very quick to grasp things these days, and again through a personal example, they see how I am, and whether they like it or not, they will most likely end up like me. And I'm

not saying it's a good thing, but that's the way it is. One day you look in the mirror and you realize you've turned into your mother.

Haha, maybe not always, but what I'm trying to say is that they know that a woman can do anything, you know, like change the light-bulb, or be self-sufficient. I go to work every day, and I tell them, this is the salary, we have money for this, but we don't have money for that etc., so I'm not creating illusions for them. I try not to, and they know that if they have to take time and do something for their family, they can because their mother did.

## Appendix D: Illustration of Steps in Data Analysis

### Step 1: Initial coding of themes and marginal remarks on interview transcripts

*growth*  
*independence*  
*individualism*  
*self-worth*  
*critical thinking*  
*broadened perspectives*  
*outsider's view*  
*questioning prior knowledge*  
*prejudice stereotypes*  
*breaking stereotypes*  
*making discoveries*  
*bonding w/other cultures*  
*critical thinking*  
*broadened perspectives*  
*breaking stereotypes*

**On Personal Development . . .** *- growth -*

I always say that for me 1 year spent in the U.S. equals about 5 years spent here, in terms of everything because I experienced so much there. And also, I came back I felt that time was passing very slowly in Georgia. Nothing seemed to have changed in that one year, the people were the same, while I had changed so much, and I had experienced so much in that one year.

I was 25-27 years old at that time, but this was my first experience living alone, on my own, making my own decisions. I lived with my parents in Georgia even at that time. *independence*

And I am so happy that I had this opportunity to live independently. This was a unique experience which taught me a lot about myself. I can say without exaggeration that that's when I got to know myself.

I think we have a very collective culture here where you know, like, if everybody else is happy, I don't necessarily have to be happy...but you know, down to the core, if you're not happy as a person, you cannot make anybody else happy, so I think that's another thing that the U.S. has boosted in me. I feel like I value my health, emotional and mental, telling myself that I have to be strong and happy as a person first of all, you know, to be a good mother, good co-worker, good friend. *self-worth*

Oh, and also, one of the best things that I got from studying abroad, away from my home... You know, I somehow emerged from Georgia, I came out of a deep hole, and I ended up on top of the world... And I could look down on my own country and examine it in whole. I noticed I also became more objective towards myself, toward my family members, friends, and the country in general. *outsider's view*

This is when I made my first steps in critical thinking, independent thinking, and forming my own opinions based on my own observations and experiences. *questioning prior knowledge*

This was a very different experience from being taught something, you know? It's amazing how confined your mind and thinking can be when you live in one place only and don't have much contact with the world outside.

**On Intercultural Competence . . .**

The perception that I had about foreigners in general before I went to the U.S. was that no one is capable of the kind of friendship that we have here in Georgia, and that they are, more or less, superficial in their relationships. *perceptions prejudice stereotypes*

I have to say neither of these perceptions held true because the loyalty that I saw in my Indian and Afghan friends was incomparable. We were very similar in terms of our core

*Step 2: Eliminating and merging initial codes/themes and creating a short list of themes under each domain*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	CAREER DEVELOPMENT
Individualism	Dismissing stereotypes and bonding with other cultures	Attitudes and perceptions about citizens' roles and responsibilities prior to U.S. experience	Skills and qualities, gained in the U.S
Self-confidence	Becoming more tolerant and less judgmental of differences	Changed attitudes and perceptions on citizens' roles and responsibilities post U.S. experience	Leadership positions held post U.S. experience
Self-efficacy	Gaining an outsider's view on own country		

*Step 3: Sorting relevant quotes from all interview transcripts under each theme*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT		
Individualism	Self-confidence	Self-efficacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I was 25-27 years old at that time, but this was my first experience living alone, on my own, making my own decisions. I lived with my parents in Georgia even at that time. And I am so happy that I had this opportunity to live independently and grow through the obstacles I had to overcome. (NK)</li> <li>- When you are plucked out and put in a different setting and you're on your own, you cannot depend on anybody, you rely on yourself only, so when you end up in puzzling situations, you are forced to think and to take responsibility for your actions and find solutions. (MM)</li> <li>- That was the kind of life I was looking for; having independence, living away from my family. (LI)</li> <li>- All of a sudden I had freedom in a lot of ways: freedom of making my own decisions and being in control of my life. (MB)</li> <li>- I ended up in the situation where I couldn't rely on my friends, parents, brother, father's friends etc. It was tough, but in retrospect, it was</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People found it interesting to see that I was no longer an introvert, which I was before I left. I was much more open and comfortable when socializing with people. (LI)</li> <li>- Looking back now, the one big thing that studying in the U.S. gave me was to become more open and less shy. I say that I'm still shy, but I learned how to hide it. (NK)</li> <li>- Speaking of low self-esteem, knowing about how many good friends I have from different countries makes me think I can't be that bad if, you know, he or she wants to be my friend because they're so awesome. So like I said, it makes me a very rich person that I know so many people from different walks of life and of different nationalities. (MM)</li> <li>- The U.S. was comfortable because you feel like a person, people respect you even if you're a foreigner and aren't established as a professional there, and, well, it seems that you have higher self-esteem. You feel empowered and it propels you towards good things and success. (TK)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge, skills, perspectives I gained from that experience, matured me as a person and gave me an amazing sense of achievement, and then I thought, wow, if I could do this, that means I can do anything. (MM)</li> <li>- It gave me opportunities and it showed me that if I want to have a better life, I can achieve it, even as a little girl from Georgia. If I am energetic, if I have a goal and the will, I can do things. And that's a huge motivation. (NSH)</li> <li>- I believe in myself now. I believe that if I try hard, I'll be able to achieve what I have set my mind to. (LP)</li> <li>- I became ambitious and strong and I kind of knew who I was in life and I also created a plan for the next 10 years and I strictly followed that plan. (TG)</li> <li>- Before I never really set goals, I used to go with the flow and see what happened. But being in the U.S., I saw how people set goals and had a strategy to achieve these goals... I was quite amazed by that I loved it. I wanted to be the same way. (NK)</li> <li>- Being in the U.S. didn't change who I was, but it changed my attitude.</li> </ul>

## Appendix E: Letter of Solicitation

Dear Global UGRAD and Edmund S. Muskie Programs Alumni,

My name is Nino Bitsadze and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program at Seton Hall University in New Jersey, USA. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research project.

The purpose of the research is to explore how studying in the United States and living in an American community affects Georgian students' personal growth, attitudes toward cultural and religious diversity, civic engagement, and career attainment. Alumni of Global Undergraduate and Muskie programs have been selected as a sample of U.S. educated Georgian citizens for this research.

Given that this study aims to uncover post U.S. study outcomes, ideal participants (alumni) will have completed the program and returned to Georgia at least one year prior to their participation in this research, that is, in 2010 or earlier.

As a valuable contributor to this research, you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview (depending on your schedule) which will be conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia any day and time at your convenience between July 8 and August 19, 2011. If you would like to participate in the research but you are not going to be in Tbilisi during the specified time period, I will gladly set up an online (Skype) interview with you.

During the interview, I will ask you a few open-ended questions about your U.S. study experiences and how you perceive these experiences to have shaped and/or altered your personality, your views on cultural and religious diversity, your role as a Georgian citizen, and your professional accomplishments. Interview will be conducted in English, unless Georgian is preferred by the interviewee. With your permission, the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder.

Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study.

Your role in this research is vital, so your contribution will be greatly appreciated! If you would like to participate, please contact me at [nino.bitsadze@student.shu.edu](mailto:nino.bitsadze@student.shu.edu) at your earliest convenience or **by July 10, 2011**.

Thank you in advance for your interest and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,  
Nino Bitsadze

## Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter



### Informed Consent

Nino Bitsadze, a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy Program at the College of Education and Human Services, Seton Hall University, is conducting a study called "Assessing U.S. Education Outcomes for Georgian Students."

#### **Purpose of Study and Duration of Subjects' Participation**

The purpose of this research is to explore how studying in the United States and living in an American community affects Georgian students' personal growth, attitudes toward cultural and religious diversity, civic engagement, and career attainment. Alumni of U.S. government funded study programs: FSA Undergraduate and Edmund S. Muskie graduate fellowship program have been selected as a sample of U.S. educated Georgian students for this research. Expected time commitment by research subjects for this study is 60 to 90 minutes, depending on their availability.

#### **Study Procedures**

This study employs in-depth interviewing methodology. During the interview, which will take place in a semi-public place (such as a library, café, coffee shop, park etc.), the researcher will ask the participant a few open-ended questions about his/her U.S. study experiences and how he/she perceives these experiences to have shaped and/or altered his/her personality, views on cultural and religious diversity, role as a Georgian citizen, and professional accomplishments. Interview will be conducted in English, unless a participant requests that it be conducted in Georgian. With the participant's permission, the interview will be audio-recorded with a digital voice recorder. If the participant is unavailable for a face-to-face interview, Skype session may be set up and audio-recorded with Skype's internal conversation recorder with the participant's permission. If the participant does not wish his/her interview to be recorded, the researcher will only take notes in her memo book.

Some of the questions to be asked during the interview are the following: *How would you describe the changes in your personality while in the U.S. and after your return to Georgia? How would you describe your level of empathy and/or understanding toward cultural and religious differences prior to and after participating in the program? Can you tell me a little bit about the community service activities you have participated in prior to participating in the program and after your return from the U.S.? In what ways has your participation in the FSA Undergrad/Muskie program influenced your community involvement? How do you perceive the knowledge and skills gained from your U.S. study experience to have helped you in forming your career?*

#### **Instruments**

No questionnaires or survey instruments are used in this research.

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A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

## Appendix F (continued)

### Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. If the participant decides to take part, he/she is still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

### Anonymity

There is no anonymity in this study because the researcher will know who the participants are. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be ensured by keeping research notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher. All electronic data will be stored on a USB memory key. When no longer necessary for research, all materials will be destroyed.

### Audio Records

Audio records will be kept confidential on a separate USB memory key (transferred from the voice recorder). This USB memory key will also be stored in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher until the study is completed. The researcher and the members of the researcher's committee will review the collected data. Each participant has the opportunity to obtain a copy of their interview (both audio and transcribed). Participants should tell the researcher if a copy of the interview is desired.

### Risks or Discomforts

There are minimal to no risks involved in this study.

### Benefits

There is no direct benefit to the participant.

### Compensation

There is no monetary compensation to the participant.

### Contact Information

If you have questions regarding this research project you may contact Nino Bitsadze at [nino.bitsadze@student.shu.edu](mailto:nino.bitsadze@student.shu.edu) or her mentor Dr. Joseph Stetar at [Joseph.Stetar@shu.edu](mailto:Joseph.Stetar@shu.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a human research subject, you may contact Dr. May F Ruzicka, director of Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research at (973) 313-6314 or [irb@shu.edu](mailto:irb@shu.edu).

All subjects will be given a copy of the signed and dated Informed Consent Form.

I agree to be audio-recorded during the face-to-face interview for this study  
 I agree to be audio-recorded during the Skype interview for this study

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



