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Enhancing Student Learning Outcomes Through Increased Predeparture Preparation for Study Abroad

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Enhancing Student Learning Outcomes Through Increased Predeparture Preparation for
Study Abroad

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SIT Graduate Institute

May 27, 2014

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Student name: Catherine Raleigh Date: May 27, 2014

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Abstract

Numerous studies have shown that each year, more students in the United States choose to study abroad. Some universities have even taken steps to make international study a requirement. Similar to the increased competitiveness for students to attend and thereafter, to stand out in college, making the most of one's overseas experience, going to more exotic locations and delving deeper into the local culture, will follow in this pattern as a means to be more competitive upon graduation. Increased awareness of the needs of students studying abroad will need to be addressed and students across the spectrum of both mental and physical ability will need to be more greatly accounted for.

How can the negative effects of international study be mitigated through increased predeparture planning and mentorship? Will increased predeparture preparation limit the challenges students who study abroad face? Using the fall 2013 voyage of Semester at Sea (SAS) as my focus, I investigated the challenges students faced during their international experience. This case study was conducted through a survey exhibiting the students' perspectives and predeparture support, as well as faculty and staff interviews demonstrating professional observations of students' adjustment and behaviors abroad.

This study demonstrated that overall, students had little predeparture support at their home institutions prior to their international programs. Little was known about culture shock, though faculty and staff reported that universally it was experienced. At risk behaviors abroad, students' overall mental health, and academic accountability also proved to be factors influencing students' overall experience and success.

Introduction

Study abroad is a powerful educational tool, enhancing student's interest in his or her academic work, developing career skills, and boosting one's overall confidence. As numerous studies have demonstrated, study abroad impacts a person's worldview, allowing for active engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

Each year, more students in the United States decide to study abroad. According to the Institute of International Education's, *opendoors 2013 "Fast Facts"* report, United States participation in study abroad has more than tripled in the past two decades. In the 2011-2012 academic year, 283,332 U.S. undergraduate students studied abroad, accounting for 9.4 percent of the total undergraduate student population in the country. This was a 3-4% increase since the 2010-2011 school year alone (2013). "The tipping point is very near. When the nation reaches it, studying abroad will be little more unusual than enrolling in college," explains a 2005 report from the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (p. 8).

Many American colleges and universities have already taken steps to making international study the norm at their institutions. The University of Minnesota has an institutional goal of having 50 percent of the undergraduate students study abroad. Likewise, Goucher College now requires all undergraduate students to complete at least one intensive course abroad and Harvard University has goals to take this further to make study abroad an undergraduate degree requirement (2005, p. 22).

As more schools make study abroad an undergraduate requirement, the needs of all students must be addressed. However, as the number of students studying abroad continues to increase, so does the number of undergraduate students with severe

psychological difficulties. In recent years, increased accountability has been pressed upon both sending universities and third party international study providers to identify and assist students with advanced psychological needs. This pressure has continually increased, as the number of undergraduate students diagnosed with mental illness and placed on medications for psychological issues has become a growing concern. In a 2013 survey by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, 70 percent of college counseling center directors said the number of students with severe psychological problems has increased on their campus in the past year. The survey found that of the students receiving counseling, anxiety presented the top concern among college students, followed by depression, and then relationship problems. Furthermore, on average, the survey found “24.5 percent of clients were taking psychotropic medications” (Barr, Krylowicz, Mistler, & Reetz, 2013, p. 9). However, 19 percent of the 400 counseling directors surveyed also reported that the availability of psychiatric services on their campus were inadequate, thus students are possibly receiving counseling and medication from outside physicians.

Similar to the increased competitiveness for students to attend and stand out in college, making the most of one’s overseas experience, going to more exotic locations and delving deeper into local culture, will follow in the pattern (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, pre. p. VIII). As the number of undergraduate students studying abroad continues to increase, so will the increased competitiveness of the programs and need for students to demonstrate their overseas accomplishments. In addition, increased awareness of the needs of students studying

abroad will need to be addressed and students across the spectrum of both mental and physical ability will need to be more greatly accounted for.

The question I will try to answer is, "How might the negative effects of international study be mitigated through increased predeparture planning and mentorship? Do students and educators believe that increased predeparture preparation will limit the challenges students who study abroad face?" In my experience, most students were not well informed about the effects of culture shock. This led me to question what a student's experience would be like if he or she was better able to identify his or her feelings during one's experience. If a student is better prepared by his or her home institution prior to going overseas, will he or she move through the experience with greater ease, making more out of his or her international opportunities and limiting the onset of both physical and mental distress?

In order to review this question, the fall 2013, Atlantic Exploration, voyage of Semester at Sea was used as my research focus. Semester at Sea, a program of the Institute for Shipboard Education (ISE), is currently celebrating its 50th Anniversary voyage. Over the course of the past 50 years, the program has developed immensely to address the needs of changing student populations. Semester at Sea is a study abroad program, which offers a comparative education approach, rather than immersion within a single country. Over the course of the voyage, the *MV Explorer* visited 17 ports in 16 countries across Europe, Africa, and South America. The program is accredited by the University of Virginia, which was founded by Thomas Jefferson, in advancement of his

ideal of an ‘academical village’ where students and professors could live, work and socialize together (ISE, 2014).

This Jeffersonian Model is apparent in the floating campus of Semester at Sea. The fall 2013 voyage was made up of approximately 575 undergraduate level students, six academic and student life deans, 38 professors, and 27 staff members. The professors had backgrounds in a variety of disciplines and came from universities across the United States, as well as Canada, England, Norway, and Kenya. Of the 27 staff members on the ship, 12 held direct contact roles, responsible for the physical and mental health of the students. Included in this was the four-member medical staff team, made up of two licensed psychologists, a nurse practitioner, and a physician, as well as the eight resident directors on staff, each with a background in student life at his or her home institutions. Students, faculty, staff, and the ship’s crew made up the shipboard community, representing Thomas Jefferson’s ‘academical village.’

Literature Review

Global learning has quickly become a focus of higher education institutions in an increasingly globalized world. University internationalization is demonstrated through articulated institutional commitment, administrative staffing, curriculum development, faculty practices, campus partnerships, and particularly through student mobility (American Council on Education, 2012, p. 4). With increased student mobility comes increased responsibility on behalf of the student and the home institution to prepare each individual for his or her international experience to his or her greatest potential.

“Students’ predeparture expectations and attitudes toward a specific culture or people may significantly influence outcomes” (Dekany, 2008, p. 19).

There are many factors weighing on students’ choices, development, and overall experience while abroad. There is much research on the effects of culture shock on students abroad (McCabe, 2005, p. 52; Angulo, 2008, p. 6; Lucas, 2009, p. 200), and increasing focus on demonstrating the impact and implications of study abroad on a student’s mental health. Currently, there is an increasing focus on student decision-making and academic focus while abroad as it relates to motivation at the students’ home institutions (Dekany, 2008, p. 18-21). However, there is little research focusing on domestic universities, as they prepare students to move through these factors successfully.

Culture Shock

Culture shock, as defined by Zeitlin in Angulo’s doctoral dissertation, is the “realization that expected behaviors and perceived values of the new environment are disturbingly dissimilar from those at home” (2008, p. 6). This can be described by students abroad with feelings of confusion, isolation, frustration, vulnerability, and depression. As part of the overall experience, students should be made aware of such stress and discomfort that will likely be a part of the experience so that they are more able to adapt to the new environment (p. 9).

In their 1995 study, Martin, Bradford and Rohrlich describe the influence of expectancy on a student’s experience and overall cultural adaptation while abroad. In their work, Martin et al. describe significant studies finding that while the fulfillment of such expectations leads to satisfactory adaptation abroad, “violations of expectations lead

to negative evaluation of the sojourn, problematic adaptation, and even mental illness” (p. 88). As noted by the authors, the results of such studies indicate the implications of greater cross-cultural training, preparing sojourners for realistic expectations and cultural adaptation strategies (p. 105).

Hulstrand (2009) explained the importance of “recognizing that depression, homesickness, and culture shock are all normal parts of the education abroad experience, and knowing that it’s dangerous to add excessive use of alcohol to an already challenging mix is important for students to be armed with” (Hulstrand, 2009, sup. p. 7). Lucas (2009) explains the critical factor of culture shock recognition and the risks associated with its effects. He acknowledges that culture shock is different from an adjustment disorder, as defined in the DSM-IV, the international manual of mental disorders, where culture shock itself is not defined. However, this does not discredit its reality.

Brein and David (1971) discuss the social and psychological factors related to the adjustment problems of students abroad in their study, “Intercultural Communication and the Adjustment of the Sojourner.” The study discusses many factors that affect a sojourner’s intercultural adjustment, including curves of adjustment, personality typologies and traits, and background and situational factors. For the purpose of this research, I will focus on the curves of adjustment, specifically the U and W curves or adjustment functions. The U-curve phenomenon was first described by Lysgaard in 1955, in a study of Scandinavian Fulbright Scholars studying in the United States. Here, he recognized the curvilinear pattern in each person’s adjustment to his or her new location. This was furthered by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) to incorporate an additional ‘U’ motion, creating the ‘W-Curve.’ This adjustment function encompasses both the student’s

adaptation to a new culture and adjustment upon returning home. As Brein and David explain, the W-curve function represents adjustment along a temporal dimension, in that

The sojourner tends to undergo a decline in adjustment shortly after entering a foreign culture, which is followed by a recovery stage with a resultant increase in adjustment; then, on returning home, the sojourner undergoes another decrease in adjustment followed by a second stage of recovery (1971, p. 216).

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) note that the degree and duration of the adjustment curve varies for each individual based on a variety of variables. As Brein and David (1971) explain, the decrease in the sojourner's adjustment begins after an initial tourist-like phase. At this point, the person has been in the host country for a period of time and may feel increasing stress to adapt to his or her new environment. Here, as a need to develop coping strategies in the new culture, a student will look to delve deeper into the culture than his or her previous limited involvement. Social communication and satisfactory relationships with others in the culture become necessary to understanding one's surroundings. However, upon working one's way into the new culture, the student may find that he or she "lack(s) the social tools or means to bring these [relationships] about" (p. 217).

Understanding culture shock and the triggers propelling the curvilinear process, it becomes apparent that the preparation prior to departing for one's experience may play a large role in affecting the depth of the 'W-curve' experience. Brein and David noted a 1956 study by Sewell and Davidsen that found that language ability, social interaction with Americans, and previous contact with other cultures may influence the rate that a sojourner passes through the phases of the W-curve (p. 217). In addition, they note, as found in Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), that culture shock can be equated to the

“cognitive dissonance that results from the discrepancy between the sojourner’s expectations of the host culture and his observations of that culture” (p. 218).

Furthermore, the authors note Lundstedt’s study (1962), maintaining that a closed mind and ethnocentrism, as well as other factors that may be worked upon prior to departing for abroad, also limit one’s ability to efficiently move through the curvilinear process (p. 221).

Where some sojourners may rapidly recover from this low point, finding personal strategies to work through intercultural challenges, others may never fully recover from the initial difficulties throughout their experiences. Adjustment difficulty ranges in severity, and manifests in anxiety, insomnia, heavy drinking, and other “typical neurotic symptoms” (Brein and David, 1971, p. 222). These symptoms are evident in the works of other, more recent, authors’ works as well, including Angulo (2008) and Lucas (2009). Considering these symptoms, in conjunction with the already apparent increased threats to college-age students, namely mental illness and binge drinking, it is evident why steps need to be made to ease students’ transitions into the cross-cultural experience.

At Risk Behaviors Abroad

Peterson (2003) describes a “magical thinking phenomenon” in which students convince themselves that decisions abroad do not count as if they were at home. Here, Peterson explains that students have a subconscious feeling that their environment is so different, what they do overseas does not count. As a result, students engage in activities they would not have undertaken previously.

When removed from one’s normal, comfortable setting, as well as friends, family and school, and placed in a new environment, students are at an increased risk of falling

into dangerous behaviors, explained Peterson, who cited pregnancy, drug use and mental illness as the three largest issues with overseas travel for young people. Peterson used a variety of studies to support her case. This included the 2005 study of young travelers to Southeast Asia conducted by Potasman, head of the infectious-diseases and travel clinic at the Bnai Zion Medical Center, who found that 75% of such travelers reported taking drugs during their trips. In another on-going study Potasman also found that 11% of young travelers experienced some psychiatric distress during the course of one's experience, while only 2.3% sought treatment for such issues before travel. In addition, Peterson reported studies estimating that between 2%-10% of returning travelers have acquired sexually transmitted infections while abroad.

Lucas (2009) explains this phenomenon, in which Resident Directors on-site at various study abroad locations have reported difficulty in counseling students and have demonstrated that such issues are on the rise. Lucas discusses the issue of binge drinking among college students in general, citing that 45 percent of the 8 million students attending college have binge-drinking habits (2009, p. 192). Considering this in conjunction with Peterson's research, which suggests the increase in such habits when abroad, it is no wonder why Resident Directors are finding themselves in very stressful positions.

A 2011 study by Pedersen, Cruz, LaBrie, and Hummer, of the Society of Prevention Research, suggests that American college students' drinking tendencies abroad can be defined through social norms theory, in that "individuals are influenced to engage in behaviors based on their perceptions of how others are behaving or how accepting others are of their behavior" (2011, p. 402). In this way, when students have

limited exposure to a particular culture, especially one, as Pederson et al. suggest, which glorifies alcohol use in popular culture, students' drinking rates while abroad may be influenced. Furthermore, "predeparture perceptions of the drinking behavior of other American study abroad students in general and within one's host country predicted increased drinking for students while abroad" (2011, p. 402). With such indicators of the students' perceptions leading to binge drinking while abroad, Pederson et al. concluded that it is imperative to develop preventative approaches to reduce associated risks while abroad. Promotion of cultural immersion goals and predeparture preparation may help reduce such risk, as "the more sensitive a person is to the norms of a culture, the greater the likelihood they may behave in culturally-appropriate ways while also reducing risk" (2011, p. 407).

Mental Health

As Lucas (2009) suggests, the abuse of alcohol also relates statistically to unprotected and high-risk sexual activities, depression, and suicide. Regret or harm to the student alone can cause severe mental distress, but as McCabe (2005) describes, challenges to mental health on their own — before being compounded by other outside factors — is a severe problem among young people studying abroad. McCabe, president of the Institute of Shipboard Education, describes many factors impacting one's mental health while abroad. These factors include changes in medications, social pressure, loss and separation, and simply adapting to local conditions. To make this matter more significant, there are many issues in identifying and responding to the student's distress, including, but not limited to a lack of available mental health services.

College students are already an at-risk population for developing mental health issues. McCabe (2005) demonstrates this advanced risk, noting a 2005 American Psychiatric Association study that found “nearly half of all college students report feeling so depressed that they have trouble functioning, and 15 percent meet the criteria for depression” (2005, p. 52). Furthermore, he noted that the number of college students taking psychiatric medications increased by 15.5 percent from 1994 to 2004. Resident Directors on site at various study abroad locations have reported difficulty in counseling students and have demonstrated that such mental health issues are, in fact, on the rise. Lucas (2009) describes issues with “depersonalization, or derealization” where student studying in a new environment feels as if he or she is not right with the world and struggle more than usual in finding one’s place. Here, it is evident that mental health concerns may not only be magnified while overseas, but may be triggered for the first time in participants.

Not all study abroad programs have the capacity to provide mental health support and often, mental health facilities in other countries do not provide the same support that students may need, if there are options for support at all. As Leggett (2012) explains, “the goal is to identify ways to include and support students, not screen them out” (Leggett, 2012, supp. p. 11). By identifying key concerns of each student going overseas, home institutions may support each individual student in finding an international program that can work specifically with his or her needs.

Considering the various aspects of mental health and study abroad preparation discussed by Lucas and Leggett, it is likely that campus-wide support is needed to ease students into an international experience. Hulstrand (2009) urges that experts from each

campus' student health and psychological health centers should play a pivotal role in working with study abroad advisors to develop predeparture orientation sessions and materials for students (Hulstrand, 2009, supp. p. 2). This process should address students across the spectrum of mental health. As McCabe (2005) noted, it is important for international education professionals to be able to identify mental illness as a presumably treatable condition, as well as each person's overall mental health, in order to be "better able to consider programmatic changes that lead to and sustain good mental health" for everyone both before and during an international experience (p. 53).

Academic Focus in Study Abroad

Cadd (2012), discussed the need for students to be held academically responsible during one's experience overseas. Using the example of foreign language proficiency development, Cadd discovered methods for students' home institutions to encourage students to delve into the host culture to get the most out of their international experiences. In his example, by developing a one-credit-hour course prior to studying abroad to increase language proficiency and cross-cultural and culture shock understanding, and a post-experience course to assess student growth, students were more apt to engage with people in the host country rather than limiting themselves to time with other Americans (p. 235). In addition, Cadd discussed the benefits of assigning 'tasks' to students during their experiences, in order to keep them focused.

This method can be compared to the Expanded Regional Action Scheme for Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) model in Europe, which also targets specific vocational tasks for students to focus through the experience. Comparison between American models of study abroad and ERASMUS often suggests that more U.S.

students take elective courses while abroad rather than focusing on one's main field of study from the vantage point of the new setting. "Even the academic instruction settings [of the American model] are an expression of culture and values embedded in a particular society" (Dekany, 2008, p. 19), rather than the degree focused academic advancement of the European model. However, in order to take full advantage of the intercultural experience, students require the tools and motivation to fully delve into the experience. As Cadd (2012) discussed, "having the data available is no assurance that substantive learning will take place" (p. 234). The emphasis must be placed on students to take advantage of the accessibility to personal contact with experts in their field and the intercultural experiences available to them.

Research Design

Working on the fall 2013 voyage of Semester at Sea, I had the opportunity to experience life within Thomas Jefferson's 'academical village.' Living onboard the *MV Explorer*, I not only engaged with students each day, but I also was able to observe their interactions and overall experience throughout the program as a whole and in each individual port. Furthermore, as a staff member on the ship, I spent each meal and evening with other staff and faculty members, discussing our day-to-day experiences and observations of the students. Spending a significant amount of time with the resident directors and medical staff specifically, I learned more about student adaptation to life at sea, beyond what I was able to observe when I was not in direct communication with the students. In port, I often acted as trip liaison, leading students on a variety of programming, ranging from five hours to multiple days in country.

Much of my observation on the ship developed out of my experience creating a United Nations Human Rights Council trip to Geneva, Switzerland. This program was unique, in that there was an application process prior to arriving on the ship and there was mandatory associated programming onboard, both before and after the in-country experience. This allowed me to observe the adaptation of students who boarded the ship with pre-determined, academically rigorous, programming to shape their experiences and to interact with these specific students throughout the voyage. These students, coming onboard the vessel with pre-determined goals, seemed much more focused and adaptable.

Interacting with the UN student delegates, as well as other students on the voyage, and observing conversations among staff throughout the experience, it was apparent that students had a very emotionally charged experience with culture shock. In addition, alcohol and drug abuse and overall student decision-making were continuously keeping the student support staff on their toes. Semester at Sea is a unique learning environment, where students come from all over the world (predominantly the United States), at all levels of one' undergraduate education. However, regardless of the background of the student, everyone seemed to be discussing these particular challenges to his or her experience to some extent or another, and many did not know how to define or channel such emotions.

Returning home after my experience on the ship, I was able to see the bigger picture of the whole experience. The ship had a culture of its own. The *MV Explorer* had its own system of laws, cuisine, and day-to-day routines. There was a clear power structure and process to move onto and off of the vessel, just as one goes through to move in and out of a country. Throughout the four months, the students were not only adapting

to the culture of each of the countries visited, they also needed to adapt to this ship culture, an experience many did not seem to realize, or prepare for. After thinking about this topic and doing some initial research, I questioned what the experience would have been like, had the students had greater preparation before getting on the voyage. In order to learn more about enhancing student learning and student experience abroad, I decided to gather more information through both students on the voyage and voyage faculty and staff.

To obtain information about student experience directly, I created a 27-question survey using the online SurveyGizmo program. The survey included room for both quantitative and qualitative data exploration, through multiple choice, short answer, checkbox, and Likert scale questions (Appendix A). For the purposes of my research, the questions on the survey pertained to each factor discussed in my Literature Review. The first six questions of the survey pertained to general student information to ensure that I accounted for students from a wide range of universities, academic levels, and majors. Secondly, it was important that I included data as to whether it was the student's first extended international experience. Following, there were six questions pertaining to the student's home institution specifically, the involvement of his or her study abroad office, and one's overall preparation for the experience. Next, there were three questions about academic preparedness and motivation onboard the ship and three questions directly pertaining to culture shock. Subsequently, questions pertained to student decision-making and safety during the voyage, mentorship both onboard the ship and at the students' home institutions, participation in programming onboard the ship, and lastly, how students have stayed connected upon returning to their home institutions. Upon completing the survey

template, I wrote a letter to all participants completing the survey (Appendix B). The letter appeared at the start of the survey for participants to read before completing it.

Survey Gizmo generated a web link for participants to follow to fill out the survey and responses were compiled as they were received using the included software. The survey was distributed via email to each of the 17 UN program student delegates and posted on the private fall 2013 voyage Facebook page, with a request that only students on the voyage participate (as there are currently 642 members on the site, including students, faculty, and staff of the voyage). On the Facebook page, I requested that students complete the survey and also added my email address for questions about the project. Once participants clicked on the link to the survey, the letter would appear before beginning.

The data I collected from faculty and staff were through qualitative interviews. To gather participants from this group, a personal email was sent to each of my fall 2013 colleagues, requesting their participation in my research (Appendix C). Many of the faculty and staff members had also seen my survey and had access to the link on the general fall 2013 Facebook page, so they were already familiar with my research. To gain the widest perspective from the faculty and staff, I had a target population for my interviews and I sent follow-up emails to members of the staff in specific roles whose voice needed to be heard. My final interview pool included a faculty member, a voyage Dean, two members of the medical staff, and two resident directors. I was sure to recruit both first time and returning voyagers who could account for changes in overall student experience. In addition, my interviewers included three men and three women, and ranged from recent graduates in their field to retired, higher education veterans. This

allowed for a comprehensive assessment of student development through many diverse perspectives within our academical village.

The interviews were completed over the phone and lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. Each interview was recorded using the iPhone 'Voice Memos' utility function and then saved as an AAC audio file to be transcribed. The same 14 questions were asked on each of the six interviews (Appendix D). Similar to the surveys, the interview questions touched on academic motivation, culture shock, overall preparedness for the voyage, student decision-making, and use of student support staff during the voyage. The questions were sent in advance to each of the participants with an explanation of how the interview would be recorded and what the data would be used for.

Limitations

Completing survey and interview portion of this research, there were a series of limitations affecting my ability to delve deeper into my questions. To begin, I decided to focus on the effects of predeparture preparation for study abroad to guarantee that the burden of my results would not reflect poorly upon Semester at Sea. Secondly, due to regulations of the SIT Graduate Institute Human Subjects Review Student Research Guidelines, it was important not to ask questions that would cause mental stress in any way. As a result, I chose not to ask students questions about their mental health specifically, or as to whether they took advantage of the counseling center on the ship. Similarly, I did not ask the medical staff members interviewed about specific students expressing mental health concerns on the ship.

Once examining my results, I noticed another limitation of my survey was the population of students who responded. Question 25 of my survey asked, "Were you

involved in any long-term academic/ personal projects while on the voyage?” The response section allowed students to check all activities that applied to them, if any, including several programs that were either SAS-sponsored or student driven on the voyage. Gathering survey data, it was evident that a majority of survey participants were the students who were engaged in such semester long programming. For instance, 13 % of respondents were part of the Human Rights Council program and 38% were involved in in-port service projects. Overall 72.9% of respondents reported being involved in SAS sponsored clubs and organizations. My theory is that this is because I tended to know such students better because I was involved in the various organizations. However, I question whether my responses would have been different, had more students participated that had not joined in on such organized programming.

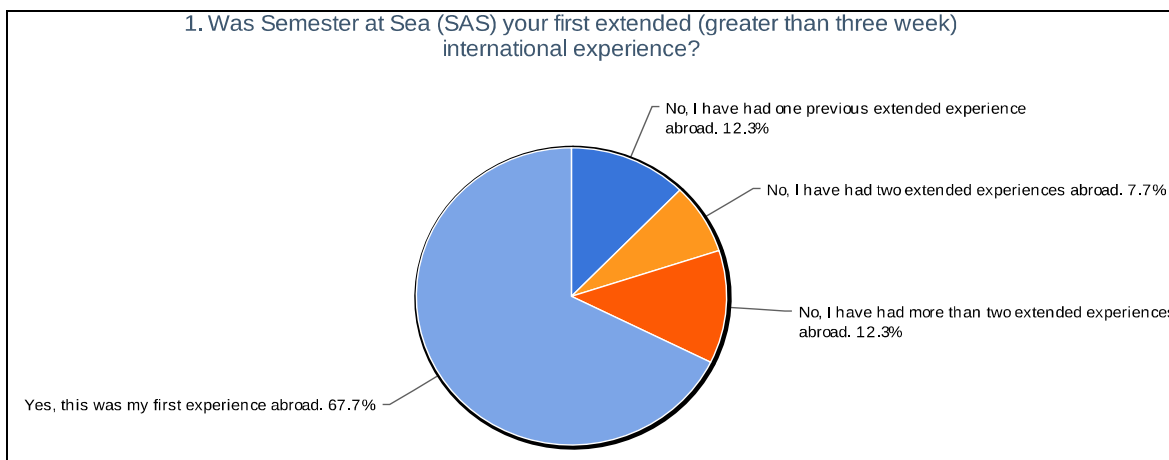
Presentation of Data

The survey and interview data yielded significant information towards my research. Overall, I received complete survey data from 65 students and completed six qualitative interviews from faculty and staff on the voyage. Brought together, an interesting perspective was demonstrated from the students reflecting on their time abroad, and the faculty and staff observing the students’ experiences.

Student Perspective Survey

Of the 65 students surveyed, 47.7% were college juniors, followed by seniors at 41.6%, and freshman and sophomore students making up the remaining 10.7% of respondents. The students came from 56 universities across the United States and four international institutions, and students from 48 different major fields of study were accounted for. In addition, 80% of respondents reported that this Semester at Sea

experience was their first time studying abroad and 67.7% of students reported that this was their first extended (which was defined as greater than three week) international experience. As one's familiarity with travel and intercultural experiences before SAS was important to my research, the results of this question were important and are represented in the table below. This demonstrates the limited number of people who had previously been exposed to new international settings.

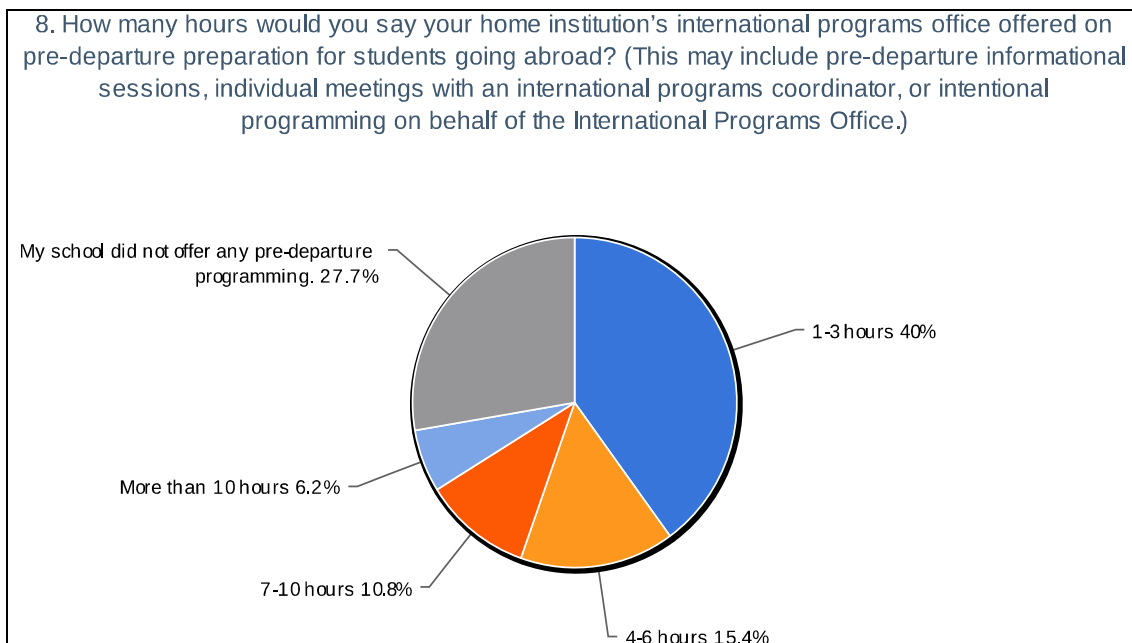


Next, a series of questions were asked about the extent of predeparture preparation students had from their home institution before leaving for study abroad. Question 10 of the survey asked “In retrospect, how satisfied were you with the level of predeparture support received from your home institution before going abroad? Responses to this question were very scattered. Overall, 43.1% of respondents reported being ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the level of support, while 23.1% reported being ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ with such support, if any, they received. However, when asked to elaborate on this, with the question “Do you feel your home institution prepared you for this experience? In what ways?” responses ranged greatly. Here, 55% of students responded unsure or negatively, with answers including, “Not really...I felt like I was being rushed through a process so people behind me in line could be helped.

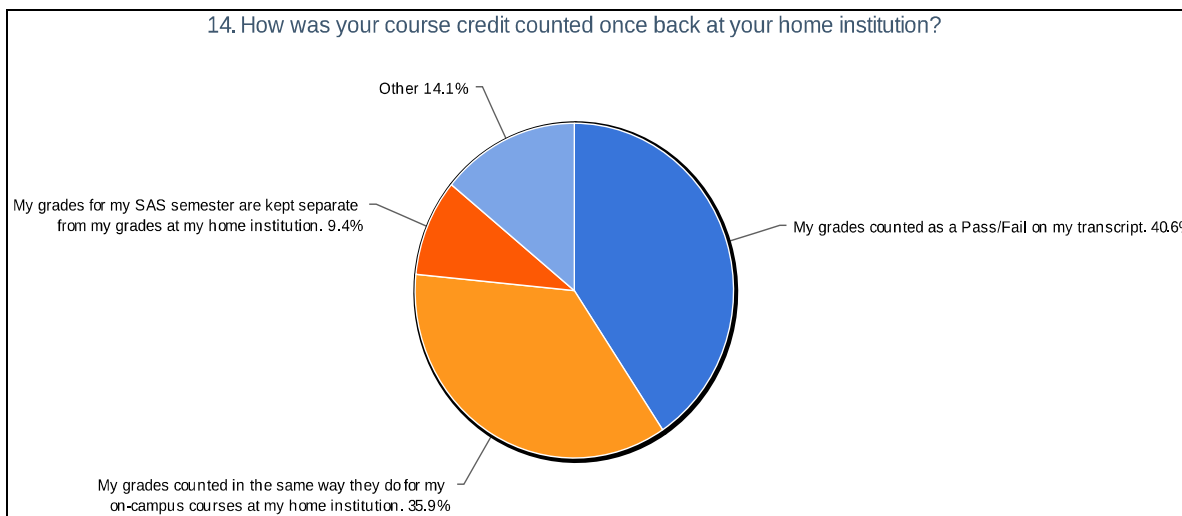
Almost all of the preparation work was done by myself.” An additional 22 % reported only interacting with his or her home institution on matters of paperwork and academic credit.

For the students who did express positive preparation support, interaction with previous voyagers was often a common theme. Results from question seven, “Before leaving for SAS, did you have the opportunity to interact with other students from your school that had participated in a voyage?” indicated that 32.4% of participants had such interactions on behalf of their home university classmates or international programs offices.

As for overall preparation and guidance from the home institution international programs office, time spent with students was generally limited. This is exhibited by question eight of the survey, which asked “How many hours would you say your home institution’s international programs office offered on predeparture preparation for students going abroad?” Responses to this question are listed in the table below, demonstrating that of the 65 participants surveyed, 67.7% reported having three hours or less of predeparture programming at his or her home institution.

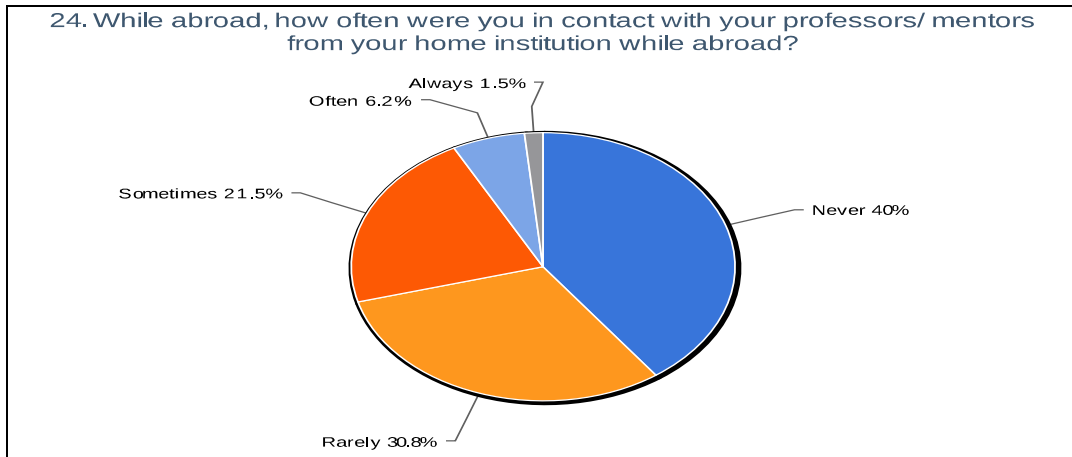


Next, questions were asked about student experience as it related to academic work on the ship and how it related back to their home institutions. On the ship, students were required to take at least four courses for a total of 12 credit hours. There were 73 courses to choose from in 24 academic disciplines, allowing for a majority of students to take both elective classes and upper-level classes in their fields of study. However, course credit was counted differently depending on the student's home institution. As demonstrated in the figure below, only 35.9% of respondents reported that grades counted in the same manner as their on-campus courses on their transcripts, while 40.8% of students reported the grades would count as a Pass/Fail (requiring at least a C for a passing mark), and 9.4% reported their grades would be kept separate. Of the nine students who marked 'other,' five reported they would receive no recognized credit from their home institutions and two were still waiting to find out if the Semester at Sea credit would be recognized.



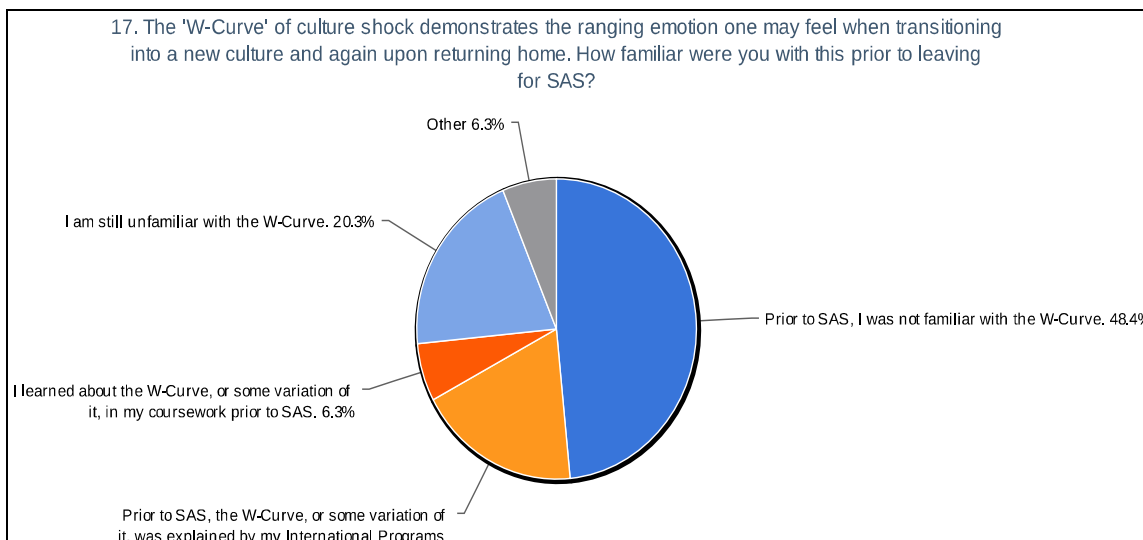
The following question asked how this credit system affected the student's motivation to do his or her best work. There was a wide range of responses to this question. Overall, 20% of participants reported being less motivated to do their best work, with responses including "Because only two of my classes counted and they were only being entered as pass/fail, I found it very hard to get motivated to do work" and "I did very minimal work on the ship, I never studied for tests and didn't feel pressured to do any coursework I didn't want to. I prioritized other things (the gym, sleeping, reading, tanning)." The remainder of respondents still reported doing their best work and holding one's academic success to a very high standard for future opportunities.

Aside from grade and credit consideration, the survey also asked students how often they remained in contact with their professors or mentors from their home institution while on the ship. The table below demonstrates that the majority of students had little to no communication with their home institutions while abroad, accounting for 70.8% of respondents. Only 7.7% reported often or always remaining in contact.



Culture Shock.

Knowledge of culture shock and its affects was an integral part of the survey. Questions asked pertained to Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) 'W-Curve' specifically, as the student participants were taught about this culture shock curve in their re-entry orientation prior to disembarkation from the *MV Explorer* in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Question 16 of the survey reiterates briefly what the curve signifies and asked how familiar participants were with this, or similar models, before their experiences on the ship. The chart below demonstrates the participants' varied responses, proving that 68.7% of respondents were unfamiliar with this before going abroad, 20.3% of which, are still unfamiliar with it.



When asked if the participants could identify this culture shock curve in their experiences, 54.7% responded positively while 42.2% of participants reported not experiencing culture shock in that way, or believing they only experienced reverse culture shock. Following, participants were asked if their experience would have been different had they learned more about culture shock before boarding the ship. Responses to this varied with approximately 25% of participants responding that their experiences would have most likely been different. Such responses included, “I think I would have been more prepared,” “I do wish my study abroad department would have been more helpful in providing some information before I left,” “Yes, I would have looked for it,” and “YES!!!”

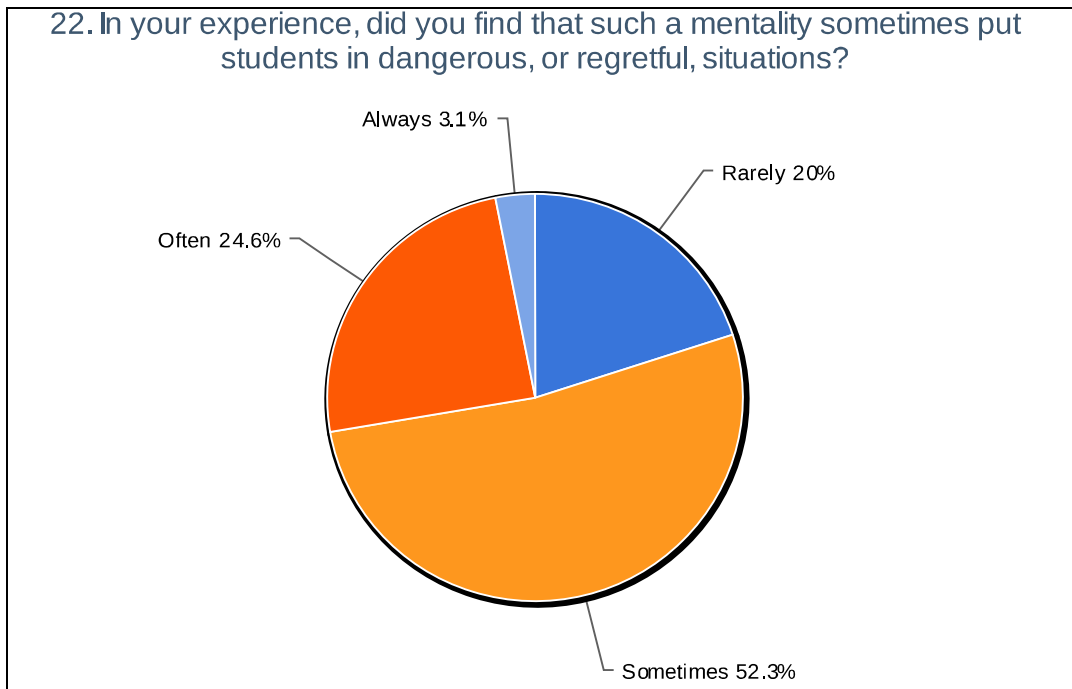
The Living-Learning Community.

Three questions were asked regarding student decision-making on the ship, mental health, and the availability of the support staff made available to students on the ship. Though these questions were not in-depth, as to not breach the Human Subjects Review guidelines, they do enhance my research outcomes. To begin, when asked “Was the living-learning community made available on the ship important to your decision to

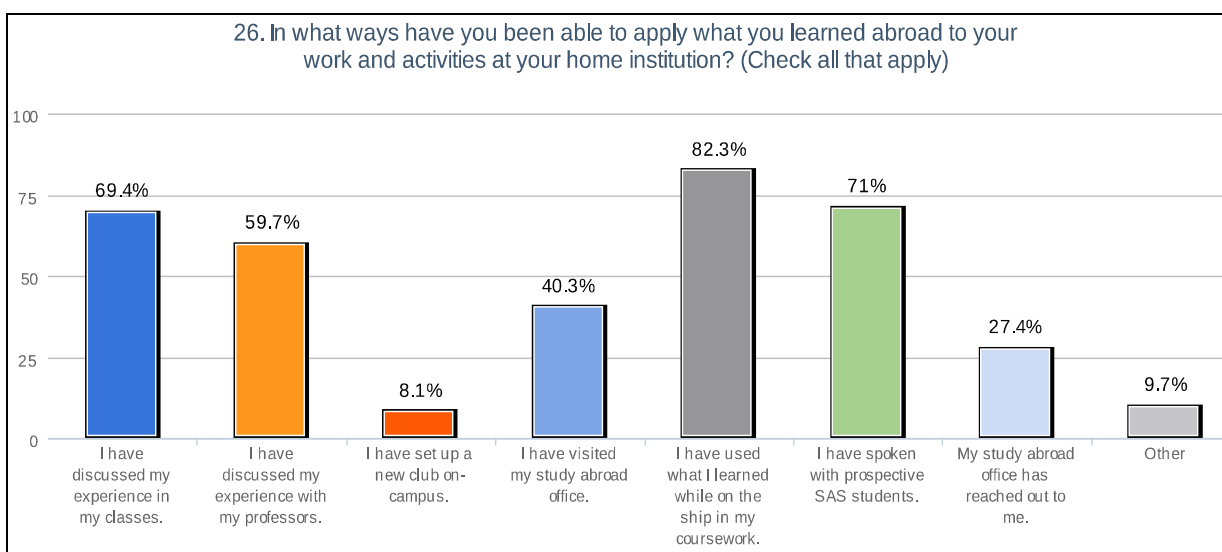
do SAS?” a large majority of the students reported positively. Common responses to this question included that counselors and resident directors were great resources, finding comfort in having the same resources available as at their home institution, and that having professors readily available made a huge difference in the participants’ academic successes. Specific responses that stood out included, “I felt safe knowing that there was going to be medical staff, counselors, and resident directors on board to look out for the shipboard community” and “I saw the counselor on the ship every week and a half and believe he allowed me to reflect more about my trip to take me to the next step.”

Student Support Services and Mental Health.

The second of these three questions explained that while studying abroad, many students tend to take risks, or partake in activities, that they would not otherwise, in a different situation. The question asked, “How apparent would you say this “YOLO” mentality was among your peers on the ship?” Of three choices, ranging from “not apparent” to “very apparent,” 81.5% of participants responded with “very apparent” and the remaining 18.5% answered “somewhat apparent.” Following, I asked, “In your experience, did you find that such a mentality sometimes put students in dangerous, or regretful, situations?” The responses to this question are charted below, demonstrating that only 20% of respondents found that this was rarely the case, while 27.7% reported that this was often or always true, and 52.3% reported that this was sometimes found.



Returning from the experience, it is evident through a common theme in the survey responses that the majority of respondents were experiencing reverse culture shock. However, simultaneously, they have also gone through great lengths to further what they have learned at their home universities. The table below demonstrates how 95.4% of survey participants have applied their learning upon returning to their home institutions.



Faculty and Staff Interview Data

Through interviewing six members of the fall 2013 faculty and staff, including one professor, two medical staff members (one psychological and one physical), two resident directors, and one Dean, I was able to gather information regarding culture shock, academic rigor, student decision-making, and mental health from a non-student standpoint. Half of my respondents were first time voyagers and the other half had completed full voyages in the past. Of the respondents who had been on multiple voyages, I asked how SAS had adjusted to the needs of the students since their last voyage. Each of the three respondents to this question reported that students seemed better prepared for this past voyage, citing that academic success is held to an increasingly higher standard and as a result, taken more seriously by the students. In addition, in the past seven years, it has become a requirement that students disclose their mental health history on their medical documents. Lastly, a resident director explained the difference between her experience on the fall voyage and a past summer voyage, attributing increased academic standards of the fall semester to lower incidences of alcohol abuse and less of an overall party atmosphere.

Academic Success.

When asked, “Did students seem to have a vested interest in doing well in their classes? Were students motivated to do their best work?” unanimously each respondent said, for the most part, yes. Respondents explained that the voyage calendar was “so jam packed there was not a lot of time to just breathe. It was country then class and then back again.” Respondents also concluded that students living amongst the faculty, dialogue over meals, and crossing paths in port had a lot to do with this success. Although each of the respondents agreed that overall students were motivated to do their best work, the

professor interviewed made a point to explain that professors were challenged as well to gear their work toward the specific population of students. Here, he noted that the students came from all different ability levels and luckily the professors were able to support each other in finding the best methods to accommodate everyone.

Overall, the respondents agreed that they had heard little of students remaining in contact with their home university. A resident director interviewed gave the example of a free post card program where students had the opportunity to update one's home institutions about their experience. However, only a limited number of individuals took advantage of this opportunity. Unanimously, respondents noted course registration as among the only time individuals reached out to their home institutions, though this could also be attributed to the limited Internet and phone access on the ship.

Student Support Services and Mental Health.

A strong case for increased transparency from students and their home institutions was made by a medical staff member who discussed that though each student was supposed to receive documentation from his or her home mental health specialist, very few students followed through on this and it became clear this was the case as students visited the shipboard counseling center. A resident director noted knowing of only one person who remained in contact with his or her mental health counselor on land. She explained that this was challenging as:

Having that counseling conversation via email is very challenging because so much of what counselors do is read the tone and body language and things like that from their patients and its hard to understand that through email conversation. The conversation I see beneficial is from the home counselor and the on-ship counselor.

The ship counselor furthered this explaining:

I think the more incidents there are of people who are in treatment on campus or even referred out from campus, I think, given there are more and more kids who are being medicated, there may have to be more interaction between SAS and people's home caregivers just as a matter of liability.

Each respondent also agreed that the support staff made available to students was a critical component of the program, expressing confusion in the success of programs that do not provide such programming. Speaking with one of the six program Deans, this was made very evident as he explained:

Even in countries you would see students coming up asking questions. I think the faculty and staff play huge roles. I can't even imagine not having that support staff, just being on their shoulders telling them to make smart decisions and stuff like that. I never thought about that, what it would have been like if we weren't around.

The resident directors and medical staff members I spoke with furthered this sense, explaining that having the support staff present kept the students more connected and engaged. As a member of the medical team explained, for some, the staff was needed for support on a regular basis, for others, it was the peace of mind and mentorship available to them. As one of the resident directors explained:

There were definitely students who I saw and had concerns about on a whole range of things, eating disorders, depression. I would make my concerns known to the counselors on the ship. Especially if they were going to meet with them anyways... If they didn't have the support there, I think it would have been really tough...being on the ship you get to know everyone and the students knew who the support staff was and what our roles were. Whereas, if the support staff wasn't there, they may have been a bit lost in terms of where to go and get those resources to be able to have those conversations with people.

The professor interviewed used the "Shipboard Family" program as an example of the need for a support system for students. This program was created as a means for student mentorship where faculty and staff had the opportunity to 'adopt' a small

community of students for weekly meals, outings, and regular discussion. This program only works well with small groups of students, he explained. When groups become 15-16 students, some become lost in the crowd and issues cannot be handled on time. This professor did happen to have a student who had serious challenges on the program prompted by her cellphone being stolen. However, the availability of support, made apparent first through her shipboard family and then the support staff on the ship, led to her success in the program.

Student Decision Making.

Andrea Peterson's (2003) 'magical thinking phenomenon' was described to interview respondents, who were then asked if this was observed during the voyage. Many themes were apparent in response to this question. Each respondent answered that yes, this was, in fact, observed. As the interviewed Dean responded, "Yes, Peterson hit the nail right on the head."

When asked this question, several respondents answered comparing it to 'YOLO,' meaning You Only Live Once, or 'FOMO,' meaning Fear of Missing Out. A resident director explained that these terms were thrown around often and students seemed to make decisions as if they were invincible and what they did would not affect them in the long run. The interviewed professor explained:

You hear those sorts of YOLO comments, I don't know whether that is the thing they are expected to say to look like experienced travellers or whether that applies to something else. I would guess that they did things they wouldn't have done at home or took risks they wouldn't have taken.

A resident director furthered this explaining:

I think that our students did not only feel like their decisions did not impact them, in like their real world...back on their home campuses, but I think that they seemed more likely to succumb to peer pressure and to be

caught up in whatever their friends were doing and that tended to be more high-risk behavior than I think that they would ever do on their home campuses and I think that that primarily related to alcohol in what I saw and I think there was also a certain amount of drug use on our voyage...

These aspects of peer pressure and drinking were other common themes among interviewees. As a member of the medical staff explained about peer pressure, “for some kids, there tends to be premature bonding.” Students, especially those with greater difficulty leaving home, quickly formed social groups and then realized it may not have been the greatest choice as they realize they have different social values. This was compared to leaving for college for the first time. Not everyone was able to separate him or herself from this. The Dean interviewed explained:

Once they get on the ship or cross the border they become a whole different person, because I am not at home, so the fears or the safety nets that we have here at home, wherever home may be, is not the same as in other countries. You are not as careful as you are supposed to be and there is a feeling nothing is going to happen to me, especially with sexual assault or abuse of alcohol. Some college students drink, but I feel on SAS it is added to it because there are all these new countries and different people... You know the minute you get off the ship, they are like ‘yeah, it’s time to get wasted.

This was furthered by a resident director who described:

You know not everyone on the voyage drank or only did at times, but I would be willing to bet, our students drank more than they do at their home institutions.... There were a lot of students who went on the voyage for the right reasons... really trying to maximize their experience and on the direct opposite side of that those who probably saw this as a four month party and really didn’t care about their classwork... I think the majority of people on the ship felt somewhere in between these two, but I think that that peer pressure aspect probably made more people lean towards having fun than maybe making the most of their experiences and weighing the academic side of things a little bit more.

Considering the many factors affecting this phenomenon, a sense of ‘what happens on the ship, stays on the ship’ was a common theme. When asked about this

behavior, as the Dean explained, “many of them said ‘you know, I’m usually not like this.’” A resident director furthered this notion, explaining:

From my position where I was in the observation room, I saw the alcohol component happen more often. Through the conversations I had there, basically they felt like their experience on SAS was in an alternate universe and so they wanted to do everything they could to make sure their experience on the ship didn’t impact their home campus or their families, so that was their main concerns when I talked to them about that decision making. It stays on the ship. It was kind of like that Vegas mentality of what happens there, stays there.

The mentality developed through this contained, short-term, environment was also attributed to the high number of short-term relationships, and ‘hook-ups,’ which took place throughout the four months.

Lastly, discussed in response to this question was high-risk decision-making. Two interviewees used hitchhiking as an example, where such activities that are highly advised against in the United States, became glorified. As a resident director explained, “Students were naïve about issues. At first, students didn’t think too much about putting themselves in situations, as if nothing was going to happen to them.” As the professor noted, overall, they were a sensible crew, “but they did sit around talking about such activities, whether or not it was true.”

Culture Shock.

Interviewees were asked to recount the ease at which students seemed to adapt to life at sea, and particularly, student experience with culture shock. Each interviewee discussed seeing students experience this process throughout the voyage, just as they experienced it themselves. However, they reported that the expression of culture shock was much different for students going abroad for the first time, than the faculty and staff who were all experienced travellers and the students who had studied abroad previously.

As Semester at Sea is not a standard study abroad program where students are immersed in a single culture for a long period of time, students not only experienced culture shock in each individual port visited, but in the culture created by life on the *MV Explorer*, itself. “The ship is definitely its own culture with subgroups and factions and mores,” explained a member of the medical staff. Culture shock was just as apparent in adaptation to life at sea. This was a surprise to many and without the ability to recognize those feelings came an increased sense of isolation and frustration, explained a resident director. This was a common theme in response to this question.

Unanimously, interviewees agreed that knowledge of culture shock prior to departure would be beneficial to students. This also extends to increased training for re-entry, as many discussed reverse culture shock and interactions with students adapting back to their home institutions. As a resident director concluded, “I think the students that did have that language for culture shock and what it was managed it more effectively. Universally they experienced it in some capacity.” When asked how the experience would have been different if all students boarded with an understanding of the ‘W-Curve’ (which was discussed at re-entry orientation), the Dean stated:

Yes, I think it would be better if they were all prepared. Like, if they took the same online course through SAS or whoever designed it, they would all have the same experience [learning about culture shock.] They would have that tool with them when they came on board, and be like ‘Yes, I remember culture shock. We talked about it.’ The more they get it before they board the ship, before arriving in these countries, the better their experience will be...the ‘W-Curve’ [discussion] at the beginning would have made a huge difference.

This was furthered by a resident director, when asked about predeparture preparation. He explained:

I think it depends on how their home institution prepare to them, specifically with the issue of culture shock...I think it would depend a lot on the study abroad office at the home institution...Having conversations with students...it seemed like after the first month things began to hit home. A majority of students didn't realize what was happening. Just having individual conversations, it was something brand new to them. Students did not know how to deal with it.

In general, greater predeparture training would have shaped the experience differently. As one member of the student support staff mentioned and others echoed, "the more information the better. Training on ethical decision-making and ethical behavior would make a huge difference." They hear a lot about the dangers of alcohol, she explained, but giving students foresight on what mental state one should be in abroad would be powerful in affecting student success.

Discussion

Conclusions

According to the Institute of Education Sciences, from the 1970s through the present, the number of Americans attending college increased significantly (2013). Over time, competition has risen and the need for students to not only attend college, but also to demonstrate their ability, going above and beyond the call of duty, has become increasingly necessary. As a result, programs have been created to help students in all areas of their studies and specialized programming to aid students along all lines of physical and mental ability have been established. In high school, students are prepared by teachers and guidance counselors to ease their way into college life. Similarly, specialized programming, through online courses, orientations, and trainings, prepare students to make safe and responsible decisions. Regardless of the programming received, the first semester away at school is often challenging. Many students do not

adjust right away to life on a college campus, potentially learning by trial and error, both academically and socially. Luckily, there are often resources available to guide students and with the proximity of family and friends, students often find themselves back on track by the end of their first semester.

Study abroad can be likened to going off to college. However, by the end of the first semester abroad, it is usually time to return home. The number of students studying abroad has increased significantly every year (IIE, 2013). With the increase in schools establishing compulsory international study requirements and increasing opportunities for study and development across the globe, students will need to work to higher standards to make their unique experiences stand out. As study abroad becomes commonplace among U.S. university students, programs must account for the entire population of today's learners. In order to do so, factors limiting student success while abroad must be targeted for development. Predeparture programming must be expanded greatly for students to be able to achieve their highest level of success in their short time abroad in the same way that programming prepares students for college.

Culture shock, mental health, academic rigor, and at-risk behavior are four factors affecting student development and success while abroad. Understanding each of these factors and the role that they play in not only the success of one student, but of his or her peers as well, is crucial to developing effective predeparture programming for students going overseas.

Considering first students' overall preparation for Semester at Sea, it is evident very little was done at the sending institutions to ready the students. From the student perspective in the surveys, the answers were mixed as to how well they felt their home

institutions prepared them. However, more than half of students' responded unsure or negatively when asked to describe this preparation. This was demonstrated further by the finding that 67.7% of respondents interviewed received three hours or less of preparation with the students' host institutions. As most students reported a majority of their time spent with their international programs office was doing general housekeeping paperwork, it is evident that, for the bulk of students, no training was received.

Hustrand (2009) urged that experts from each campus' student health and psychological health centers should play a pivotal role in working with study abroad advisors to develop predeparture orientation sessions and materials for students (Hustrand, 2009, supp. p. 2). Through interviews with the medical staff on the ship, it is apparent that there was limited connection, if any, between students' physical or mental health counselors and their international programs offices. Though students reported working with their international programs office in filling out appropriate paperwork, the shipboard counselors reported often finding students had omitted their true mental health history prior to arrival on the ship and been caught when they needed counseling once at sea. This demonstrates the growing need for dialogue between different facets of a college campus to ensure the optimal safety and well-being of students.

The increasing number of students suffering from mental health disorders on college campuses today is often attributed to the age demographic of students attending university, in conjunction with the stress and social triggers associated with college life. This makes not only the treatment, but also the recognition and diagnosis of mental health disorders, a necessary consideration both before and during one's international experience. As McCabe (2005) described, the factors impacting one's mental health

abroad include changes in medication, social pressure, feelings of loss and separation, and overall adaption to local conditions. Each of these factors is interconnected with culture shock, at-risk behaviors, and contact and support of the home university. With advanced recognition or preparation for mental distress, programs can appropriately plan for consistency in the availability of needed medication. Furthermore, with greater recognition of the symptoms associated with culture shock, a student can prepare for his or her transition into life abroad and be able to better identify one's emotions. Social pressure, discussed in-depth in each of the interviews, can be focused on for change.

Dialogue between a sending institution and a student going abroad is critical to increasing success in cultural adaption, as well. Expectation and perceived cultural understanding play a decisive role in determining the flow of a student's international experience. As Martin et al. (1995) describes how the violation of expectations of one's experience may lead to problematic adaptation and even mental illness. Likewise, in the study by Pederson et al. (2011), the authors explain that individuals engage in behaviors, such as binge drinking, based on their perceptions of the host culture towards such behaviors. With such little time preparing students for their experiences abroad, little training time is made available to adjust such perceptions and to learn about culture shock in general.

Referring back to the survey results, a 67.8% of students reported being unfamiliar with culture shock prior to their experience abroad. However, 54.7% of students reported that they could identify it in their experiences and 25% reported that he or she would have had a different experience if able to identify such emotions at the time. Unanimously, faculty and staff interviewees responded that whether or not students could

identify culture shock in their experiences, everyone experienced it to some capacity. Furthermore, it was agreed that increased predeparture training on culture shock would have positively affected the experience, giving students the terminology and understanding to move through his or her emotions in a more informed and thoughtful manner. This is one of many ways that international programs offices may expand their predeparture programming to aid a greater number of students.

Student survey results demonstrated that 81.5% of respondents reported that students took risks and partook in activities that they probably would not have otherwise while they were abroad. Furthermore, 4/5 of respondents experienced the ‘YOLO’ mentality placing their peers in dangerous situations, which was supported undisputedly by the faculty and staff. Here, as suggested by a staff member, students need training on ethical decision-making and behavior prior to their experiences. This suggestion came out of interactions with students who had found themselves in troublesome situations, explaining that what happens abroad does not matter as it does at one’s home university. Upon speaking with faculty and staff and hearing from students who reported experiencing peer pressure and the ‘YOLO’ mentality on a regular basis, it is apparent that study abroad becomes an ‘alternate reality’ (in the words of an interviewed resident director) in the eyes of students when making decisions. Here, the repercussions of one’s actions are held within a four-month window, which one may escape when they return to the ‘reality’ of his or her home institution.

If students are held to a higher standard for academic success and immersion and have a greater understanding of the host culture, this perceived idea of cultural norms toward binge drinking would be modified. The sense of “what happens on the ship stays

on the ship” would be altered because students would be challenged to come back to their home institutions having demonstrated their success in a greater capacity. As more students are held to higher standards abroad and greater cultural awareness is achieved, peer pressure to take part in high-risk activities will be mitigated. “We were very lucky,” explained a member of the voyage medical staff in reference to returning from the voyage with all participants generally left unscathed.

Semester at Sea offered a different learning environment than a majority of study abroad programs as the courses offered were wide-ranging and all based upon the American model of teaching advanced at the University of Virginia. Living onboard a vessel where students had the opportunity to have meals and visit with professors on a regular basis, students reported being overall motivated to do their best work. However, reviewing the survey results, it was evident that for many students, grades did not affect their transcripts at their home universities as long as they received a C marking or higher and for this reason, some students reported finding it very difficult to remain motivated. Only 35.9% of students reported that their grades would transfer back to their home institution in the same way as their on-campus credit. Luckily, the unique academic environment of SAS, which was furthered in interviews with faculty and staff, aided in keeping students engaged. Even so, 20% of survey respondents reported lacking motivation. Without this unique environment the students, faculty, and staff attributed to keeping students engaged, this percentage may well have been much higher, especially as 65.1 percent of students reported grades counting in a different way than their on-campus credit.

Over 70% of survey respondents reported that they had limited engagement with their home institutions while away. This was furthered by faculty and staff members who explained that the only interaction they had noticed was when it was time to register for the next semester's courses. Increasing communication between students with their home institutions during their international experiences would keep students on track, especially in programs where faculty are not readily available for student support. Likewise, as Cadd (2012) suggests in comparison to the ERASMUS model, preparing students prior to departure to not only remain motivated in their coursework but to delve deeper into the host culture upon arrival, would be beneficial in making the most of and standing out in their experiences.

This was apparent in the motivation of the UN program participants who went above and beyond to apply for this selective, academically rigorous program prior to departing for SAS. By applying for this program, students were forced to consider their goals for their semester abroad and how they would bring their learning back to their home institution. In addition, as a semester-long experience, students were held accountable for their actions by the UN Human Rights Council Program leaders and spent increased time in reflection prior to each port. Such intentional programming and responsibility are good examples of successful methods of keeping students on track while overseas.

Practical Applicability

Semester at Sea offers an environment different from the majority of study abroad programs. A floating university, designed upon the mission and standards of an American University, SAS provides students with many of the comforts of their home institutions

available to them while on the ship. The faculty and staff on SAS have the unique ability to aid students through their study abroad experiences, observing student behavior and needs when away from their home institutions. This is not the case for the majority of study abroad programs.

Culture shock, mental health distress, lack of academic motivation, at risk decision-making, and binge drinking were among the major factors affecting students' overall ability to delve deeply into their international experiences. However, these factors are not limited to SAS students. These factors are common among students studying abroad around the world and with increasing numbers of students taking part in such programs, these factors will continue to affect more people.

Luckily students on Semester at Sea had a support system available to them to help them through the process and professors to keep them on track for academic success. Not all study abroad programs have access to such resources, nor is four months a significant amount of time to overcome barriers and truly delve deeply into the host culture, whether that be the ship culture presented on SAS or of the host country on a more immersive, singular country experience. Predeparture preparation can play a significant role in mitigating such challenges. By engaging students prior to their international experiences as to what they hope to achieve, training students on the effects of culture shock, and ensuring that all students chose a program with resources that are necessary for each individual's personal success, the challenges students face abroad may well be mitigated. Additionally, by preparing further preparing students prior to their international experiences, students will gain more knowledge to bring back to their home institutions, aiding others and further internationalizing their campuses.

Recommendations for Future Research

As Semester at Sea is a unique environment, further research should be done with students who studied abroad through direct enrollment, island, or other program models. This would offer a comparison between students who had a wide network of American university support staff available to them and students who needed to independently find support. In this way, other predeparture programming support may become apparent. Additionally, it would be interesting to interview university international programs offices specifically, to find what predeparture programming is already being implemented at and how this has affected individual school's student experiences.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-Departure Preparation for Study Abroad

1. Was Semester at Sea (SAS) your first extended (greater than three week) international experience?

- No, I have had one previous extended experience abroad.
- No, I have had two extended experiences abroad.
- No, I have had more than two extended experiences abroad.
- Yes, this was my first experience abroad.

2. Was the Fall 2013 SAS voyage your first study abroad program?

- Yes
- No

3. If not, where did you previously study?

4. What is your home institution? Do you know of other students from your institution who participated in SAS?

5. What is your major?

6. What is your class year?

- Gap Year Student
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Post-Graduate

7. Before leaving for SAS, did you have the opportunity to interact with other students from your school that had participated in a voyage?

- Yes, I have friends that participated on a previous voyage.
 - Yes, I have classmates that participated on a previous voyage.
 - Yes, the International Programs Office at my home institution held intentional programming for students who participated in SAS to meet future participants.
 - No, I was the first SAS participant from my home institution.
 - Other
-

8. How many hours would you say your home institution's international programs office offered on pre-departure preparation for students going abroad? (This may include pre-departure informational sessions, individual meetings with an international programs coordinator, or intentional programming on behalf of the International Programs Office.)

- 1-3 hours
- 4-6 hours
- 7-10 hours
- More than 10 hours
- My school did not offer any pre-departure programming.

9. Can you elaborate on this programming and what it entailed?

10. In retrospect, how satisfied were you with the level of pre-departure support received from your home institution before going abroad?

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very
Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very
Satisfied | Not
Applicable |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

11. Do you feel your home institution prepared you for the experience? In what ways?

12. On a scale of 1-5, how internationalized would you say your home institution is? (For example, your institution has many international students, encourages students to study abroad, has internationally focused clubs, has international partnership institutions/ branch campuses...)

1. Isolated, not internationally focused.

2. Slightly internationally focused.

3. Moderately internationally focused.

4. Internationally focused.

5. Very internationally focused.

13. Can you elaborate on how your coursework helped you prepare or why it was not relatable to your experience on the ship?

14. How was your course credit counted once back at your home institution?

- My grades counted as a Pass/Fail on my transcript.
- My grades counted in the same way they do for my on-campus courses at my home institution.
- My grades for my SAS semester are kept separate from my grades at my home institution.
- Other

15. How did this effect your motivation to do your best coursework?

16. How aware were you of the effects of culture shock before going abroad?

Unaware

Somewhat Aware

Very Aware

17. The 'W-Curve' of culture shock demonstrates the ranging emotion one may feel when transitioning into a new culture and again upon returning home. How familiar were you with this prior to leaving for SAS?

- Prior to SAS, I was not familiar with the W-Curve.
- Prior to SAS, the W-Curve, or some variation of it, was explained by my International Programs Office.
- I learned about the W-Curve, or some variation of it, in my coursework prior to SAS.
- I am still unfamiliar with the W-Curve.
- Other

18. Can you identify the 'W-Curve' of culture shock in your experience abroad?

- Yes, I can identify how I experienced this.
- No, I do not believe I experienced culture shock in this way.
- Other

19. Do you believe your experience would have been different if you learned more about culture shock before boarding the ship?

20. Was the living-learning community made available on the ship important to your decision to do SAS? If so, can you elaborate on what resources (counselors, medical staff, resident directors, etc) were most important to your personal success?

21. While studying abroad, many students tend to take risks, or partake in activities, that they would not otherwise in a different situation. On a scale of 1-5, how apparent would you say this 'YOLO' mentality was among your peers on the ship?

Not Apparent

Somewhat Apparent

Very Apparent

22. In your experience, did you find that such a mentality sometimes put students in dangerous, or regretful, situations?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

23. While abroad, do you believe that you properly represented your home institution?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

24. While abroad, how often were you in contact with your professors/ mentors from your home institution while abroad?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

25. Were you involved in any longterm academic/ personal projects while on the voyage? (Check all that apply)

- SAS Clubs/ Organizations
- Pencils of Promise
- Vicarious Voyage
- Geneva United Nations Program
- Personal Video/ Photo projects
- Presidential Scholars
- Global Grins
- Personal in-port service projects
- Other

26. In what ways have you been able to apply what you learned abroad to your work and activities at your home institution? (Check all that apply)

- I have discussed my experience in my classes.
- I have discussed my experience with my professors.
- I have set up a new club on-campus.
- I have visited my study abroad office.
- I have used what I learned while on the ship in my coursework.
- I have spoken with prospective SAS students.
- My study abroad office has reached out to me.
- Other

27. What piece of advice would you give future SAS participants to help them to mentally prepare for the experience? Would this same advice have shaped your experience differently?

APPENDIX B

Pre-Departure Preparation for Study Abroad

Dear Semester at Sea Fall 2013 Voyage Alumna/us, I invite you, as an alumna/us of the Fall 2013, 50th anniversary voyage, of Semester at Sea, to complete a survey about your experience. I am very interested to learn about how your experience was shaped by your pre-departure preparation for the voyage. Looking back, do you believe that you were well supported going into your international experience? Did you have ideas for what you wanted to accomplish while at sea? Has this experience shaped your experience at your home institution in the short time that you have been back? Taking part in the 50th anniversary voyage of Semester at Sea was certainly a unique opportunity, bringing together participants and alumni, to experience how the program has developed and changed over time. I understand that your time is limited and I greatly appreciate you taking 10-15 minutes to respond. Filling out this survey is completely voluntary and your responses are anonymous. Thank you so much for your assistance with this project. The information will be compiled as part of my graduate capstone research and is not linked to Semester at Sea or the Institute for Shipboard Education in any way. I would be happy to share my findings with you throughout the process. If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact me. Sincerely, Catherine Raleigh
Graduate Student, International Education SIT Graduate Institute Fall 2013 Semester at Sea
Assistant Field Office Coordinator and Field Lab Specialist

APPENDIX C

Dear _____,

I am sure you are very busy right now, but I was wondering if you would have the chance this week to participate in a brief interview? I am just finishing up my master's research right now on predeparture support for study abroad and I am using our voyage as a case study for my work. I'm looking at how predeparture support on behalf of a student's home institution affects their experience overseas.

If you have 10-15 minutes at any point this week or weekend, I would greatly appreciate it. I have also been interviewing other faculty and staff from our voyage. The responses will be kept anonymous in my work, differentiated by faculty/ staff and indirect titles (a member of the medical staff, a dean, etc.), if that is ok with you. I also want to make it clear that my intention in asking these questions is not to surmise what Semester at Sea needs to improve upon, but rather patterns in students while abroad that may be altered if students have greater predeparture support.

Thank you. I hope all is well and that we can catch up soon!

Catherine

APPENDIX D

- Is this your first voyage?
 - If not, how has Semester at Sea adjusted to student needs since your last voyage?
- What surprised you about student decision-making during the voyage?
- Andrea Peterson describes a “magical thinking phenomenon” in which students convince themselves that their decisions abroad do not count as if they were at home. This often leads to decisions that can be both physically and mentally harmful to the student. Did you observe this during the voyage?
- Did students seem to have a vested interest in doing well in their classes?
- Were students motivated to do their best work?
- How would you compare this to students at your home institution?
- What do you think the experience would have been like for student had the support staff not been present? For instance, was having a medical support staff a critical aspect of the experience?
 - Was having professors living amongst the students important to keeping them on track?
- What can you tell me about student adaptation to life at sea and the first couple of ports? Overall, do you believe students were well prepared?
 - Did they come onboard with an understanding of culture shock?
- Did you notice what contact students kept with their home university?
 - Did they express interest in bringing what they learned back to their home institutions?
 - Did they remain in contact with professors from their home university while on the ship?