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# LIFE AFTER STUDY ABROAD: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF GRADUATE STUDENT STUDY ABROAD RETURNEES

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LIFE AFTER STUDY ABROAD:  
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF GRADUATE STUDENT STUDY ABROAD RETURNEES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership

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Meredith Fant Wilson  
May 2014

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Accepted by:  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The number of graduate students who chose to participate in study abroad experiences has grown within recent years. As this population of study abroad participants continues to expand, it is necessary for study abroad faculty and staff to understand the learning outcomes that graduate students experience after their study abroad program.

This study sought to uncover the long-term impact of a study abroad experience on a graduate student participant. By utilizing narrative inquiry as a methodology, the researcher collected lived experiences from four graduate student study abroad alumni. Each participant's narrative story was re-told and analyzed for growth experienced as a result of their study abroad experience.

The study identified four themes that graduate students who participate in a study abroad program experienced. The themes included increased self-confidence, an appreciation for diversity, self-reflection, and career and learning development.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, who has supported me throughout this process, and to my committee chair, Dr. Pamela Havice. Without their support none of this would be a reality!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for their support and guidance throughout this process. Tony, I will never forget the initial conversation that we had when I started on this journey. Your words of wisdom helped me seek balance in my life during the past six years. Uttiyo, thank you for believing in me and supporting me from the day that I met you! In times that I have doubted myself, I could hear you say, "Get it done!" Together we have finally reached the finish line. Dr. Spearman, thank you for believing in me and supporting my decision to go against the grain. When I set out on this journey to conduct a narrative research study, I felt confident in my abilities because of you and the lessons you had taught me. Last, but certainly not least, Pam, thank you. There are few words to describe how indebted I am to you. You have challenged and supported me for the past twelve years. Without your encouragement and friendship I would not be here today.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **NATURE OF THE PROBLEM**

An education abroad program, as defined by The Forum on Education Abroad (2011), is “in-classroom and out-of-classroom related activities that comprise a credit-bearing education abroad experience” (p. 9). The first known study abroad participants were graduate and postgraduate students sojourning for the purpose to gain information and experiences that could not be found in their home country (Hoffa, 2000). But over the past 200 years, study abroad participation has shifted from graduate and postgraduate students to a majority of participants studying abroad during their undergraduate education. Study abroad programs are a popular choice for students, both undergraduate and graduate, looking to diversify their education (Stebbleton, Soria, & Cherney, 2013).

#### **Study Abroad Growth and Trends**

Although students have been studying abroad for many years, the field of international education has expanded within the United States (US) in the past few decades (Rexeisen, 2013). Not only are more students choosing to study abroad, but also the diversity of program duration, destination, and academic offerings are growing, which is creating more opportunities for US college students to add an international education experience into their curriculum (Stebbleton, et al., 2013; Norris & Dwyer, 2005). Each year, The Institute of International Education (IIE)

compiles data from colleges and universities throughout the US and reports the data in their annual *Open Doors Report*. The *IIE 2013 Open Doors Report* outlined that graduate student participation in study abroad programs grew from 8.7% in 2001/02 to 13.5% in 2011/12 (See Appendix A) (Institute of International Education, 2013). Since 2001/02, not only have the number of graduate students who participated in study abroad experiences grown, but also nearly 40% of all study abroad students chose to participate in a short-term, summer study abroad program (See Appendix B) (Institute of International Education, 2013).

Little empirical research has been conducted to assess the variation of outcomes for different types of study abroad programs; but regardless of the program's duration or level of immersion, study abroad participants are likely to benefit from increased self-awareness, more well defined career plans, and improved self-confidence (Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Given the increased popularity of study abroad participation, additional research studies are needed to confirm that study abroad experiences positively contribute to the long-term personal growth and career development of participants (Stebbleton, et al., 2013; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009).

### **Personal Growth**

Many undergraduate study abroad alumni describe a long-term holistic impact on their personal lives that they attribute to their study abroad experience. Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2010) indicated that international study provided an

alternate environment that forced students to think about the world and about themselves in a different paradigm; the experience also provides a mechanism which allows students to grow from these challenges and to gain a greater sense of direction in life. By living and learning in a new environment, study abroad participants may experience culture shock. With the experience of culture shock comes a heightened sense of personal awareness that challenges study abroad students to examine their own culture and personal beliefs (Themudo, Page, & Benander, 2007). While the literature base does support that study abroad experiences are beneficial to participants, returnees often struggle to articulate their personal growth and development as a result of their international experience (Long, 2013).

### **Career Development**

Study abroad experiences can impact a student's decision to pursue a particular career or increase their desire to work internationally (Norris & Gillespie, 2008). The skills gained and growth experienced by study abroad participants as a result of their time abroad can be beneficial in their professional growth and career development, as well. In a recent graduate study, the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES Abroad) found that 84% of respondents indicated their study abroad experience helped them gain job skills (Preston, 2012). Skills, such as adaptability, independence, self-confidence, problem solving ability, and working with diverse individuals, may be enhanced during a study abroad experience

(Tillman, 2011). As a means of enhancing resumes and interviews, study abroad returnees are encouraged to emphasize the skills gained through their study abroad experience to help market themselves during their job search (Orahood, Woolf, & Kruze, 2008). Thus, it is important for students to learn to articulate their study abroad experience, in order that their growth and development may be highlighted into their resumes and job interviews.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While the literature that addresses the impact of study abroad experiences is growing, few studies have been conducted on the experiences of graduate student study abroad participants. To understand how graduate student study abroad participants are impacted by their study abroad experience, there is a need to conduct studies that allow the lived experiences of study abroad participants to be shared. This particular study will address a gap in the literature base by utilizing narrative inquiry to gather individual stories from graduate study abroad participants to discover the long-term personal growth and career impact that their study abroad experience had on them.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study sought to uncover the long-term perceived growth of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program. By interviewing students up to nine years after their study abroad experience, the

researcher hoped to gain insight about the perceived personal and career growth of graduate student study abroad program alumni. Because this research study focused on graduate students' perceived growth as related to their study abroad experience, the study fills a gap in the current literature base. The results of this study will inform international educators and study abroad faculty leaders on the outcomes that graduate students gain from studying abroad.

### **Research Questions**

This research study addressed a gap in the body of literature, by seeking to uncover the long-term perceived growth of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology, the researcher gathered individual lived experiences of graduate student study abroad program alumni. The following research questions guided this study:

- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their personal growth as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?
- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their career development as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?

By utilizing narrative inquiry in this study, the researcher collected individual lived experiences from graduate student study abroad alumni and from myself, a graduate student study abroad alumna.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical grounding for this study is rooted in experiential learning theory and career development theory. Within this study, these theories were used to address how study abroad experiences enhance the personal growth and career and learning development of graduate student study abroad alumni. Specifically, the theories that guided this study were Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1984; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012) and Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 1979; Krumboltz, 2009). Further discussion of the theoretical framework is located in Chapter Two.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

For this particular study, I employed a qualitative design, which provided an opportunity to learn more about individual graduate student study abroad alumni and their unique experiences. By choosing to conduct this research study using narrative inquiry, the lived experiences of study participants were gathered in order to gain a better understanding of whether the participants' study abroad experience impacted their life from a personal growth or career development perspective.



## **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a method of qualitative research that has gained popularity with researchers within the past couple of decades (Riessman, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). When conducting a narrative study, researchers gather stories (narratives) from participants to gain knowledge about a topic through the lived experiences of others.

Narratives are stories, which provide a beginning, middle, and end. Narrative stories have a plot and allow the researcher to see the context in which participants have encountered life experiences. Riessman (2008) stated, "In a dynamic way then, narrative constitutes past experiences at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past" (p. 8).

Narrative research can provide (a) a greater understanding of how an experience or experiences impact an individual; (b) give readers the ability to relate to the experiences and emotions encountered by individuals; (c) provide participants with an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences; and (d) create the opportunity for social change (Riessman, 2008). One unique part of narrative inquiry is that the researcher is also part of the story. Consciously or not, the researcher has lived the experience being shared through the telling of the story; and the researcher also plays a role in ensuring that the story is re-told in an accurate and effective manner. Huber, Caine, Huber and Steeves (2013) stated, "indeed narrative inquiry resides in the relationship of the researcher and

participant(s) who may also become co-researchers as the relationship evolves” (p. 220).

For this research study, I chose to use narrative inquiry because, as stated by Ellis and Bochner (2000), “I wanted a more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship, one that centered on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world” (p. 744). I, the researcher, have also featured my own experience as a graduate student study abroad alumna on a short-term, faculty-led program.

### **Significance of the Study**

The body of literature regarding the impact of graduate student study abroad experiences is nascent; and, therefore, additional research studies are needed to specifically address the long-term personal growth and career impact that a study abroad experience has on graduate students. By studying the lived experiences of graduate student study abroad participants, the results of this study will guide international educators and study abroad faculty leaders towards a greater understanding of what graduate student study abroad participants take away from a study abroad experience and how the experience impacts their long-term personal growth and career development.

## **Researcher's Subjectivity**

In conducting this study, as a study abroad advisor and former graduate student study abroad participant, I anticipated challenges in remaining objective throughout the experience; but by stating my subjectivities and being aware of my own biases, my participation has made this study stronger. Within this study, I have many personal and emotional ties, which are explained below.

### **Experiential and Personal Biases**

As a graduate student, I participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program that is the framework for this study during the summer of 2005. I studied abroad in England where I took a graduate level course that examined the higher education system of England in comparison to the higher education system in the US. At that time I did not even conceptualize that the trip was a study abroad experience, but rather I saw the trip as an opportunity to travel to Europe. Nevertheless, this experience was paramount in shaping my education and my personal perspectives.

Upon my return to my home university after my study abroad experience, I frequently referred to my experiences abroad in classroom discussions and demonstrated a passion for learning more about cultural differences within higher education; but even at that time, I did not fully conceptualize what had happened to me. There was no re-entry support or follow-up from faculty leaders or the study abroad office on my home campus and I was left to sort out this experience on my

own. Not realizing how this might impact me later, my experience came and went. In other words, I did not actively reflect on my study abroad experience or conceptualize the impacts that my international education had on me.

### **Professional Bias**

In the fall of 2007, I accepted a position working as a study abroad advisor. Since beginning this role, my institution has sent over 5,000 students abroad; and I have traveled to more than twenty countries. Traveling throughout the world alone has taught me that I can do anything that I set my mind to. Being a study abroad advisor has helped me gain experience in crisis management, learn lessons from the students I advise, and expand my knowledge of other cultures. My job provides me with close student contact before, during, and after students' study abroad experiences. This hands-on portion of my position allows me to witness the changes study abroad participants experience as a result of their study abroad experience.

I deal with these biases and others on a daily basis when I am advising students about study abroad opportunities and when I work with them upon their re-entry into their home university. When advising students, I try to take my biases out of their decision making process; and instead I work to provide them with the tools needed to choose the study abroad program that best suits their academic needs and personal wishes.

In life, and in research, I fall within the interpretivist paradigm; and therefore, I would refer to myself as a constructionist. When I talk to people, I listen

to what they are saying; and I use their words to build meaning behind their words. I believe that we all have experiences and life stories to share. After all, these stories and experiences have made us what we are today. Thus, when I talk to students who have just returned from a study abroad experience, I am able to relate to their experience and how this experience has contributed to their life story.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

As with any study, there are challenges and limitations within the scope of the research study. Communicating these limitations is important to ensure readers that the researcher is cognizant of restrictions and ethical research practice (Creswell, 2009). Due to limited resources, the researcher chose to interview participants who were geographically located within a two-hour radius or could be interviewed using FaceTime®. By controlling the accessibility to participants, the researcher was able to utilize face-to-face interactions with all participants. The face-to-face interaction was important, as it provided the researcher with an opportunity to witness how each participant responded to questions asked and allowed the researcher to adapt interview questions and probes when necessary during the interview (Driscoll & Brizee, 2010). Face-to-face interviews also allowed the researcher to hear participants accounts of their study abroad experiences first-hand and to clarify questions and responses during the interview (Dialsingh, 2008; Driscoll & Brizee, 2010).

Conducting a narrative inquiry was an arduous but rewarding task as a novice researcher. Not having had extensive interviewing and data analysis experience previously, I was at first tenuous, but my confidence in my abilities grew during this experience. While conducting this research study, it was important for me, the researcher, to be cognizant of the relationship of time as it related to participants' stories. As time passes, individuals may forget details of life experiences or they may not be able to recall portions of their experiences. In seeking to obtain the lived experiences of graduate students who participated in a study abroad experience three to nine years ago, I trusted the participants in this study to be honest and truthful about their experiences. Within narrative research, it is important to understand that stories are embedded into a larger life narrative and the meaning that we give stories may change throughout time (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Although the findings of this study are not generalizable in the same way that quantitative results may be, "the goal (of narrative) is to use your life experience to generalize to a larger group or culture" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737). In addition to informing readers, the participant stories will also allow individuals to relate to the participants and to appreciate the uniqueness that each story brings to the study (Riessman, 2008).

In addition, our stories are embedded into a larger life narrative and the meaning that we give them may change throughout time (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Despite these limitations, it is important for individuals to tell stories and to share their experiences. Stories help to jog our memories, create opportunities for

reflection, connect us with the past, and help us make plans for the future (Kramp, 2004).

### **Definition of Terms**

Below are definitions of terms that were in this study:

- Career – “A career is defined as the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a lifetime” (Super, 1980, p. 282)
- Duration (or length) – “The period of a sojourn or education abroad program, excluding the pre-departure preparation or post-return activities” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 14).
- Education Abroad – “Education that occurs outside the participant’s home country. Besides study abroad, examples include such international experiences as work, volunteering, non-credit internships, and directed travel, as long as these programs are driven to a significant degree by learning goals” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 12).
- Education Abroad Program - “In-classroom and out-of-classroom related activities that comprise a credit-bearing education abroad experience” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 9).
- Experiential Education – “Learning by doing. This term, which traces its origins to the works of John Dewey, encompasses a vast array of

approaches to learning inside and outside the classroom that complement more conventional instruction” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 17).

- Faculty-led Program – “A study abroad program directed by a faculty member (or members) from the home campus who accompanies students abroad. Usually, though not always, brief in duration” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 14).
- Graduate Student – “A student enrolled in a program of study leading to a degree beyond the baccalaureate level” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 3).
- Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) – “The Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) is an attempt to explain how and why individuals follow their different paths through life and to describe how counselors can facilitate that process” (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135). “HLT posits that human behavior is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences made available by both planned and unplanned situations in which individuals find themselves” (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135).
- International Education – “A field involved in facilitating and supporting the migration of students and scholars across geopolitical borders. Professionals in this field may be employees of educational institutions, government agencies, or independent program and service providers” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 11).



- International Experience – “Any opportunity, credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing, undertaken by a student outside of his or her home country” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 11).
- Long-term impact - For the purposes of this study, long-term impacts are defined as the perceived changes that a graduate student study abroad participant has experienced within the three to nine years since their study abroad experience.
- Narrative Inquiry – “Here narrative refers to a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centered and temporally organized” (Riessman, 2008, p. 5).
- Personal Growth - Refers to characteristics, personality traits, personal preferences and aspirations of the individual study participants.
- Returnee – “An education abroad participant who has returned to the home institution after completion of her or his program” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 25).
- Short-term – “Lasting eight weeks or less; may include summer, January, or other terms of eight weeks or less” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 15).
- Study Abroad – “A subtype of Education Abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution.

This meaning, which has become standard among international educators in the US, excludes the pursuit of a full academic degree at a foreign institution” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 12).

- Study Abroad Program – “An education abroad enrollment option designed to result in academic credit” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2011, p. 13).
- Temporality - Within narrative inquiry, temporality is the relationship of the study to time (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

### **Organization of the Study**

This study was organized into five individual chapters that together describe the research study conducted. Chapter One, Nature of the Problem, introduces the research study that was conducted and outlines the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, research design and methodology, significance of the study, researcher’s subjectivity, challenges and limitations, definition of terms and addresses the organization of the study.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, addresses the literature base that currently exists for the field of international education and specifically the outcomes of study abroad experiences that have been studied. This chapter also includes a comprehensive review of the theoretical framework that served as the foundation of this study.

Chapter Three, Methodology and Pilot Study, summarizes the pilot study design and outcomes found from a small study conducted, which informed the study at hand. The chapter also outlines the dissertation research study design, study participants, research questions, sample selection, interview protocol, data analysis and role of the researcher.

Chapter Four, Data Presentation and Analysis, presents the narrative stories of each participant. Each narrative was analyzed individually to identify themes that emerged. At the end of the chapter, common themes that appeared within all four stories were addressed and further analyzed.

Finally, Chapter Five, Findings and Implications, analyzes the narrative stories collectively and discusses the findings of the study. In addition, this chapter discusses conclusions and implications from the research study conducted.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Organization of Chapter**

This chapter addresses a review of the current literature that has been published on the topic of study abroad and the impact that study abroad has on students who participated in a study abroad experience. The organization of the chapter is meant to provide readers with a broad understanding of study abroad experiences and the impact that study abroad experiences had on participants. The chapter provides readers with a historical perspective of study abroad and then narrows the discussion to address the impact that study abroad has on students from a personal and career perspective. By thoroughly examining the current literature base, the chapter also identifies gaps that exist within the current literature, thus justifying the study at hand. Lastly, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical framework that served as the foundation for this study.

#### **Research Questions**

This research study addressed a gap in the body of literature, by seeking to uncover the long-term perceived growth of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology, the researcher gathered individual lived experiences of graduate

student study abroad program alumni. The following research questions guided this study:

- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their personal growth as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?
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By utilizing narrative inquiry in this study, the researcher collected individual lived experiences from graduate student study abroad alumni and from myself, a graduate student study abroad alumna.

### **The History of Study Abroad**

The field of study abroad has a relatively short history hailing from the mid-twentieth century. However, in looking at the history of scholars from centuries ago, the pursuit of knowledge in faraway lands is not a new tradition. Early on, scholars traveled abroad to acquire knowledge that could only be gained elsewhere. Sojourning was left to boys nearing manhood, as well as anthropologists and scholars pursuing advanced degrees who were seeking information unavailable to them within their homeland (Hoffa, 2000). Like the earliest scholars, international scholars today seek to learn from their travels, expand their experiences, and embark on new adventures (Hoffa, 2000).

There is evidence which shows that faculty-led study abroad programs are not new to study abroad but rather a tradition that began in the late 1800's. Indiana University was one of the first United States (US) institutions to offer faculty-led study abroad programs, but it is not likely that Indiana University faculty were alone in the pursuit of sharing international experiences with their students. Hoffa (2000) stated the following:

While no one at the time would have even raised the possibility of earning academic degree credit for participation in these programs, these excursions suggest that a number of American colleges and universities felt some responsibility, beyond the formal borders to their many constituencies. Equally important, this fleeting exposure to foreign cultures came not solely through formal campus instruction but rather through what later would be seen as experiential modes of learning – by being there and observing and discussing what was seen and otherwise lived” (p. 45).

During the 1920's, the creation of faculty-led study abroad programs became more common (Hoffa, 2000; Norris & Dwyer, 2005). These academic programs typically evolved from a well-traveled faculty member who sought to create an international experience for his/her students. “Many such tours were probably not distinguishable from other forms of tourism, except that the group was made up of students from one institution and had at least the pretense of ‘education’ rather than simple ‘enjoyment’,” stated Hoffa (2000, p. 97). Although faculty-led study abroad programs were, and are, mostly offered during the summer semester, parents and

students were more likely to agree to support a faculty-led study abroad program, even if that meant paying for summer courses. Over one hundred years later, this mindset remains the same among students and parents. Short-term programs, including faculty-led programs, are the most common study abroad program model used by students today (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Institute of International Education, 2013).

As colleges, universities, and students accepted the notion of study abroad as a part of higher education, World War II began. During World War II, it became clear that international education initiatives would have to cease, as traveling throughout the world was too dangerous for faculty and students (Hoffa, 2000).

After World War II began, the US government realized that US study abroad students could play a key role in enhancing diplomatic efforts (Themudo et al., 2007). In addition, the US government realized that having US students abroad would help the international image of the US during the post-war era and that these students would help stimulate the economies within Europe. Following World War II, the US government created the Peace Corps, Fullbright grants, and the International Education Act of 1966.

Without the creation of this infrastructure, the field of international education likely would not have grown as much as it has (Hoffa, 2000). During the postwar era, college and university campuses throughout the US built study abroad programs and strengthened relationships with foreign universities. In addition, the number of study abroad programs grew radically during the postwar era and the

expansion of study abroad on campuses eventually resulted in the creation of the field of international education. (Hoffa, 2000).

Part of the rapid growth of the field of international education was directly related to the increase in study abroad program options that were introduced by outside organizations. In the 1960's what are now referred to as third party programs were created. Third party study abroad providers were comprised of independent organizations that created study abroad programs for students and consortiums among US colleges and universities. Third party providers allowed students to have more study abroad program choices (Hoffa, 2000).

As the number of students participating in study abroad programs increased during the 1950s and 1960s, four non-profit organizations were created to help provide an infrastructure that could support the needs of colleges and universities, international educators, and students (Hoffa, 2000). The four cornerstone organizations were (a) the Institute of International Education (IIE), (b) the United States National Student Association (USNSA), (c) the Council on Student Travel (CST), and (d) the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA). These organizations helped create opportunities for clear and concise communication about study abroad among international education constituents. These organizations also helped build networks of professionals who could share best practices and in some cases provided funding to help support student international study (Hoffa, 2000).



## **The Impact of Study Abroad**

There are a multitude of study abroad program options that students must examine in order to find the program that best suits their academic goals and personal needs. Whether a student participates in a short-term, faculty-led program through his or her home university or participates in a full academic year exchange program, there are outcomes that need to be assessed. Study abroad has been positively associated with student success (Long, 2012). Norris and Dwyer (2005) stressed the need to ensure that the impact and value of study abroad experiences are understood by study abroad constituents, including policy makers, parents, and students.

Within the field of international education, there are many long-held assumptions about student experiences in reference to program duration, language of instruction, housing options, and program model (Norris & Dwyer, 2005). However, the 2002 Institute for the International Education of Students Model Assessment Program (IES MAP) study found that regardless of the type of program that students participated in or the duration of the program, study abroad alumni greatly benefited from the experience (Norris & Dwyer, 2005). Themudo et al. (2007) stated:

Any person immersed in another way of life cannot help but learn about social language use and cultural expectations. Inevitably the shock of the new forces most people to also look inward and experience greater personal

awareness. As a result, students and faculty can experience profound changes as a result of even short-term study abroad (p. 65).

In addition, Themudo et al. (2007) found that even during short-term study abroad experiences, participants reported a heightened desire to continue their studies and students' cultural awareness was enhanced. Little empirical research has been conducted to assess the variation of outcomes for different types of study abroad programs, but regardless of the program's duration or level of immersion, study abroad participants are likely to benefit from increased self-awareness, more well defined career plans, and stronger self-confidence (Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). With nearly half of all study abroad students participating in programs that last eight weeks or less (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Institute of International Education, 2013), all integral personnel must have a clear understanding of the impact that students experience as a result of their study abroad program participation.

### **The Impact of Study Abroad on Personal Growth**

Upon the return of study abroad alumni to their homes and to their classrooms, parents, faculty, and peers identify changes within each individual. Similarly, educators who work with study abroad can come up with many examples about the impact of study abroad experiences, but many times it is difficult to articulate how a study abroad experience has impacted a student's cultural or personal growth and awareness (Doyle, 2009).

Bolen (2006) questioned student learning outcomes when he wrote “do students really learn anything by studying classical rhetoric in Athens, Greece for a month that they would not have internalized in the same course back in Athens, Georgia?” (p. 24). Because study abroad experiences cannot merely be measured by grades it is difficult to assess the benefits that students receive from his or her study abroad experience (Steinberg, 2002). Doyle (2009) reflected on student growth below:

The campus community rarely gets a good sense about how students grow and change during their semester(s) studying abroad. By the time students reenter the flow of campus life their distinct memories have faded or they have processed the experience to the point where it is not in the foreground of their life any more. When asked to put their experiences studying abroad into words, students usually can only respond with such unsatisfying phrases as “it was great, life-changing,” or the truly vacuous “it was awesome (p. 144).

The study abroad assessment process is ambiguous because much of the students’ learning takes place in unstructured situations, and their growth is often holistic in nature. Doyle (2009) used the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) and in-depth interviews to explore holistic growth in study abroad participants in a study. Studies found students to be more aware of and to have an increased respect for other cultures. In addition, study abroad participants were determined to have higher levels of self-confidence, independence and maturity (Doyle, 2009; Norris &

Gillespie, 2008). With an increase in self-confidence, independence, and maturity, comes a myriad of benefits and life changes that can be experienced by individuals. Similarly, Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2010) found that study abroad experiences provide an opportunity for students to challenge their way of thinking and to experience growth during that process. Norris and Gillespie (2008) wrote, “living and studying in another country engage and affect participants’ personal development, worldview, and intellectual and cultural interests, influencing their future decisions” (p. 395).

### **The Impact of Study Abroad on Career Development**

The number of study abroad opportunities has been on the rise, making study abroad experiences more accessible for students to incorporate into their academic career (Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Institute of International Education, 2013; Tillman, 2011). As more students choose to participate in study abroad experiences, study abroad stakeholders must have a clear understanding of the benefits that come with a study abroad experience (Malmgren & Galvin, 2008).

Given the need to communicate with individuals from different cultures, most undergraduate study abroad alumni gained interpersonal communication skills during their study abroad experience (Orahood, et al., 2008). Although, gaining leadership and communication skills are beneficial, the true benefits of study abroad are realized when the skills earned help study abroad alumni secure a job after graduation. Study abroad advisors and other international educators

proclaim the benefits of studying abroad, as studying abroad has the ability to elucidate the direction students take, give the student a new perspective on his or her academic work, and strengthen skills that will benefit the student when he or she begins his or her job search (Tillman, 2011). However, to take full advantage of their study abroad experience, students should articulate the educational experience and describe their time abroad through meaningful learning outcomes (Orahood, Kruze, & Pearson, 2004).

Although students and international educators recognize participants' growth and development after a study abroad experience, having confirmation that employers also recognize these benefits is important. In an ever-changing global world, students are encouraged to study abroad, not only by their home colleges and universities but also by future employers, as students are increasingly expected to matriculate with global competencies needed to be success in the work world (Wynveen, Kyle, & Tarrant, 2011). Employers look positively upon study abroad experiences and they recognize the skills acquired during a study abroad experience as being highly desirable and advantageous in increasing career opportunities (Orahood, et al., 2004).

While the literature base supports that study abroad experiences are beneficial to participants' growth and development, returnees often struggle to articulate the personal growth and development gained during their study abroad experiences (Long, 2013). Regardless of how life-changing students' study abroad experiences have been, if they are not able to articulate the experience it is less

valuable to the participant. As a means of enhancing resumes and job interviews, study abroad returnees are encouraged to use their study abroad experience to help market themselves during their job search (Orahood et al., 2008). To this end, study abroad alumni who participated in the study conducted by Orahood, et al. (2004) indicated that their study abroad experience impacted their career plans, that they listed their study abroad experience on their resume, and that they talked about their study abroad experience in their job interviews.

The literature written about study abroad clearly indicates that study abroad participants experience personal growth and career development, but the research has not specially addressed how study abroad experiences impact graduate students three to eight years post-experience. Further, Paige, et al., (2009) stated that research regarding study abroad outcomes has grown; but most of the studies have focused on the short-term impact. Thus, with the continued interest and growth in study abroad programs, there is a need for additional research to assess the long-term impacts of study abroad programs (Paige, et al., 2009; Franklin, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical grounding for this study was rooted in experiential learning theory and career and learning development theory. The theories that guided this study were Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1984; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012) and Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 1979; Krumboltz,

2009). Both of these theories are unique, but together they complement each other by addressing extraordinary experiences that individuals experience throughout their life. Specific to this study, these theories address how study abroad experiences enhance the personal and career development of study abroad program alumni.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

Dewey (1916) was the pioneer of what is now referred to as experiential learning. Experiential education occurs when an individual is able to fully participate in his or her own learning experience and therefore the individual is more likely to retain the information learned. Dewey (1916) saw education and learning as social and interactive events. He believed that students thrive in learning environments where they are able to interact with the curriculum. Thus, the concept of experiential education views education from a holistic point of view where all experiences contribute to the knowledge set gained by individuals in the style that best suits their learning (Wynveen, Kyle, & Tarrant, 2011). To support this theory, Huber, et al. (2013) noted, “for Dewey, education, life, and experience are one and the same. Education is life and life is education, and to study life is to study education, is to study experience” (220).

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984) integrates the work of prominent scholars including Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Rogers, and others. In his

work, Kolb (1984, 2012) proposed six characteristics of experiential learning. The characteristics identified by Kolb (2012, p. 137-138) are listed below:

1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2. All learning is re-learning.
3. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation of the world.
4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation.
5. Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.
6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge.

The characteristics outlined by Kolb (1984; 2012) explained learning is a fluid process that occurs throughout an individual's lifetime through experiences and events that are connected and re-formed. Also, like constructivists, experiential learners use life experiences and to build their knowledge of the world. Kolb (1984; 2012) also acknowledged learning is motivated by differences and adaptation, as these tensions call for reflection and action from individuals involved. Further, he explained experiential learning leads to holistic learning within an individual. Lastly, the characteristics recognized that the place where learning occurs is directly related to the knowledge and growth experienced by an individual and that knowledge was constructed using social and personal knowledge to diffuse pre-existing concepts to an individual.



Within these six characteristics, one can apply the ideals of study abroad programs. As noted by Passarelli and Kolb (2012):

Study abroad programs are rich with possibilities for meaningful and transformative learning. By living, studying, and working in an unfamiliar culture, students are challenged to make sense of the novelty and ambiguity with which they are regularly confronted. As a result of this sense-making process, students adopt new ways of thinking, acting, and relating to the world (p. 138).

Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) suggests that educators play an integral role in the learning process by facilitating and guiding students learning experiences. During a study abroad experience, as students are adjusting to a new living and learning environment, they are likely to seek assistance and mentorship from their peers and educators (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2010). Within the context of a study abroad program, learning takes place outside of the classroom in everyday experiences (Steinberg, 2002). Study abroad experiences provide students and faculty with a unique learning opportunity, where the world serves as a classroom for providing them with many opportunities to integrate their learning experiences from formal and informal settings into their knowledge set. Recently, study abroad programs have intentionally utilized experiential learning techniques and have been recognized as a great example of experiential education (Ostanina, 2005; Long, 2013).

## **Happenstance Learning Theory**

Although many career development theories seem to follow a particular set of steps for career decision-making, not many individuals experience their careers in such an organized manner. An individual's career path is likely based on emotions, events, and happenstance as suggested by Krumboltz (1979). Krumboltz (1979) devised the Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) to address why individuals make choices in life, to assess how individuals navigate through their careers, and to assist career counselors in facilitating the career development process.

HLT supports the idea that all experiences in life can facilitate learning and provide opportunities, but individuals must be able to recognize the opportunities in order to be able to take advantage of them. Krumboltz (2009) acknowledged that individuals are constantly learning and acquiring new knowledge and skills in their everyday life.

In a nutshell, the HLT posits that human behavior is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences made available by both planned and unplanned situations in which individuals find themselves. The learning outcomes include skills, interests, knowledge, beliefs, preferences, sensitivities, emotions, and future actions (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135).

In HLT, Krumboltz (2009) outlines four fundamental propositions guide his work:

Proposition 1: The goal of career counseling is to help clients learn to take actions to achieve more satisfying career and personal lives – not to make a single career decision (p. 141).

Proposition 2: Career assessments are used to stimulate learning, not to match personal characteristics with occupational characteristics (p. 143).

Proposition 3: Clients learn to engage in exploratory actions as a way of generating beneficial unplanned events (p. 144).

Proposition 4: The success of counseling is assessed by what the client accomplishes in the real world outside of the counseling session (p. 145).

Within this study proposition three is of particular importance. When individuals engage in new activities, such as study abroad, they are provided with an opportunity to gain skills and experiences that will benefit them in the future. Study abroad experiences provide participants with daily learning opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom, which enhance their knowledge (Steinberg, 2002). The unplanned learning experiences presented during a study abroad experience can provide participants with self-confidence, life skills, and newly acquired interests that will have a lasting impact on their life. Krumboltz (2009) suggests that in order for individuals to control unplanned events they need to do the following (p. 144):

1. Before the unplanned event, you take actions that position you to experience it.

2. During the event, you remain alert and sensitive to recognize potential opportunities.
3. After the event, you initiate actions that enable you to benefit from it.

Thus, HLT suggests that with proper pre-departure support, on-site guidance, and re-entry programming study abroad participants will be able to recognize opportunities that come their way, capitalize on those opportunities, and integrate unplanned learning into their life and career development.

ELT and HLT support the argument that learning occurs throughout an individual's life span in planned and unplanned situations. The theories also support that skills learned and experiences in life contribute to an individual's academic, personal, and career growth. During a study abroad experience, the world serves as a classroom for participants. Their in-class and out-of-class interactions with peers, faculty, and locals provide a unique hands-on learning opportunity that can have a lasting impact when the experiences are internalized.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature addressing the history of study abroad and the impact of study abroad experiences on personal growth and career development. The literature review found that study abroad participants are impacted from a personal and career perspective by their study abroad experience. In addition, the literature review supported the need for a research study that addresses the long-term personal and career growth that graduate student study

abroad participants experience. Lastly, this chapter outlined the theoretical grounding for this study by reviewing Experiential Learning Theory and Happenstance Learning Theory.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PILOT STUDY AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Organization of Chapter**

The chapter begins with a description of the pilot study conducted prior to the dissertation study. The findings and discussions from the pilot study which informed the current study follows. From there the chapter focuses on the structure of the dissertation study, including temporality, research questions, research participants, data collection, and trustworthiness. Concluding this chapter is a statement addressing the researcher's subjectivity and personal biases.

#### **Pilot Study**

##### **Research Design**

##### ***Site of Research***

The site of the study was within the context of a faculty-led study abroad program that took place in England, Scotland or Ireland from 2004-2011. The program duration was approximately two weeks each year during the month of July. Students who participated in the program were enrolled in higher education graduate programs from across the United States and were seeking a greater awareness of higher education systems within the United Kingdom or Ireland. During this experience, students and faculty traveled throughout the host country, visiting five-seven universities and comparing their student services to the student

services provided in the United States. The academic experience was comprised of reflective journal writing, individual research papers, and an online pre-departure orientation session. On-site activities included campus tours, meetings with student services administrators, and small group discussions. These activities culminated to create a knowledge-sharing experience for participants.

### ***Study Participants***

Participants in this pilot study completed a short-term, faculty-led program hosted by faculty at a large, research-based institution in the southeastern portion of the United States within the past eight years. The study consisted of 146 program participants who studied abroad between 2004-2011. During their study abroad experience, program participants were enrolled in a student affairs or higher education graduate level program at a college or university within the US.

### ***Data Collection***

To begin the pilot study, the researcher gathered hard copy pre-participation surveys (See Appendix C) and post-participation surveys (See Appendix D) from the past eight years. The pre-participation and post-participation surveys were completed and collected by faculty members on the first and last day of the study abroad program annually. On the first day of the study abroad experience, the faculty leaders conducted an on-site orientation to prepare the trip participants for their experience. During the on-site orientation, all students were asked to complete

a pre-participation survey. This survey was comprised of a mixture of ten Likert-scale questions and eight open-ended questions. The survey questions addressed students' reasons for participation, knowledge of the country where the program was located, and perceived benefits they would gain from this experience. Similarly, the program participants were asked to complete a post-participation survey on the final day of the study abroad experience. The post-participation survey asked participants the same questions as the pre-participation survey. At the end of each study abroad program, the surveys were collected and securely stored by study abroad program faculty members.

Prior to this pilot study, the data collected had not been analyzed or sorted in aggregate. To begin the process, the researcher coded the quantitative data contained in the surveys. After the data was sorted by year and entered into an Excel spreadsheet, a basic statistical analysis was used to make assumptions about growth experienced by study abroad program participants. The researcher was able to compare participants' initial expectations and perceptions of the program to the actual perceived outcomes of the program. All survey data collected was completely anonymous and it was not possible to compare individual student experiences/growth, but rather comparisons were made based upon the entire student group.



### ***Data Analysis***

This pilot study analyzed the quantitative data collected using a basic statistical analysis. The quantitative data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics to compare and contrast the pre and post participation survey results. While analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher ensured to take on the perspective of epoche in order “to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material, that is, eliminate, or at least gain clarity about, preconceptions” (Patton, 2002, p. 485). Therefore, the researcher was constantly engaged in an objective stance when analyzing the data collected.

### ***Findings and Discussion***

Through this preliminary analysis, the researcher was able to assume that there were positive shifts in the perceptions of graduate student study abroad participants. The program participants perceived that the study abroad program positively impacted their career prospects and their ability to make academic progress more than they originally anticipated. Further, participants perceived that the study abroad experience helped them grow socially by expanding their knowledge and awareness (See Appendix E). Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2010) supported these findings when they wrote that:

International study provides an external environment that challenges students’ thinking about the world and about themselves, and it also may provide a mechanism for students to recover from these challenges and grow

stronger in a sense of certainty of life direction and in resolve to serve others (p. 96).

The outcomes of this pilot study informed the current study by drawing the conclusion that graduate study abroad students do experience personal and career growth after participating in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program. Though specific significance of the statistics could not be determined, the researcher was able to conclude that participants experienced positive shifts in their perceptions. More specifically, study abroad program participants perceived that the study abroad program positively impacted, more than they originally anticipated, their career prospects, their ability to make academic progress and their personal growth. The conclusion that students' experience of participating in a study abroad experience positively contributed to their perception of personal growth and the unexpected career growth led the researcher to ground the dissertation study using Experiential Learning Theory and Happenstance Learning Theory.

This pilot study provided insight about the impact of study abroad on graduate student study abroad participants, but the study lacked an in-depth look at individual experiences. Therefore, when planning this dissertation research study, the researcher chose to utilize narrative inquiry as a methodology. By collecting individual experiences through narrative inquiry, the researcher was able to gather the rich stories that could not be captured utilizing quantitative data.

## **Dissertation Research Study**

### **Research Design and Research Paradigm**

Research studies are constructed by choosing a research design that fits the goals of the researcher. The purpose of a research design is to create a strategy that is used to answer research questions and control variance within a study (Kerlinger, 1973). For this particular study, narrative inquiry was employed to gather the unique experiences of individual graduate study abroad participants. By opting to conduct a study using narrative inquiry, I was able to collect the narratives (stories) of each participant, obtain a better understanding of their lived experiences, and to analyze how those experiences have impacted them in the time since their study abroad program ended. Seeking to understand individual experiences and to make meaning from life events is directly related to the constructivist epistemological paradigm (Creswell, 2009).

### ***Constructivism Paradigm***

Constructivists (or interpretivists) study the realities constructed by individuals and how the constructed realities affect an individual's life and social interactions (Patton, 2002). The constructivist paradigm is associated with qualitative research, as it provides researchers with the ability to interpret meaning from interactions with study participants (Creswell, 2009).

As a constructivist, when I talk to people, I listen to what they are saying; and I use their words to build meaning. We all have experiences and life stories to share,

and because of these stories and experiences, we are who we are today. The researcher's intent within a constructivist paradigm is to interpret the experiences of others and to make meaning about how those experiences have impacted participants' worldview (Creswell, 2009). Thus, for this study, I chose to use narrative inquiry as a methodology, which allowed me to gather the unique study abroad experiences from graduate student study abroad alumni. In this pursuit, the collected narratives helped me learn how graduate student study abroad participants made meaning out of their study abroad experience and how their study abroad experiences have impacted their lives.

### ***Narrative Inquiry***

Narrative inquiry is a unique method of qualitative research that seeks to understand how individuals experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Patton (2002) noted that narrative research is influenced by phenomenology in that both methodologies seek to understand individual experiences and perceptions of experience. As stated by Ellis and Bochner (2000), narratives:

Long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions: and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts (p. 744).

When conducting a narrative study, researchers gather stories (narratives) from participants in order to gain knowledge about a topic through the experience

of others. Narrative research provides a greater understanding of how experiences impact an individual, gives readers the ability to relate to the experiences and emotions encountered by others, provides participants with an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, and creates the opportunity for social change. For this research study, I chose to use narrative inquiry because I wanted a methodology which would allow me to have personal and interactive encounters with the study participants (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

One unique part of narrative inquiry is that the researcher is part of the story. The researcher and participants are intertwined in the inquiry process and the researcher cannot be removed from the relationship (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Consciously or not, the researcher has lived the narrative with the participant through the telling and retelling of his or her story. The participants in the research study are storytellers and it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that each story is accurately shared.

Narrative study is a very intimate process and it is of the utmost importance that researchers honor relationship ethics (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Relationship ethics within the context of a research study include maintaining anonymity of study participants, an awareness of risks and danger associated with study participation, and conducting on-going self-reflection throughout the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Due to the intimate nature of conducting a narrative study, the researcher must be aware of their positionality within the research so not to have a detrimental impact on the study. By clearly stating any

biases or values, and seeking permission to conduct research researchers can bolster the validity of their study (Creswell, 2009). In order to clearly state my position within this study, I, the researcher, have included a comprehensive subjectivity statement, written my study abroad narrative, and included scanned copies of my personal study abroad journal to triangulate my experience. Further, I have outlined challenges and limitations that were faced throughout the research process. One challenge faced within narrative study was the temporal nature of narrative stories.

### ***Temporality***

Narratives are stories which are temporal in nature and contain a beginning, middle, and end. Each story has a plot, which allows the researcher to see the context in which participants have encountered various life experiences (Riessman, 2008). These stories help researchers see life experiences, as they are experienced on a continuum (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Further, narratives are defined within a multi-dimensional space. The three dimensions include: (1) a temporal dimension, (2) an interaction (personal and social) dimension, and (3) a place dimension (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Within each narrative researchers and readers should be able to identify the timeline of events, characters who play a role within the story, and the locations where the events occurred and be able to analyze all three dimensions at the same time. Because stories are not independent of time, narrative researchers have to acknowledge the importance of the past, present, and future.

This acknowledgement helps researchers understand how the past and the future could have impacted the experience.

When conducting narrative research, the researcher must be cognizant of the relationship of time to a participant's story because an individual's experience can be altered as time goes by (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As time passes, individuals may forget details related to their story or they may not be able to recall portions of their experience. Ellis and Bochner (2000) noted that one's memory in relation to time does not negatively impact storytelling, as narratives do not seek to merely mirror individual experiences.

In addition, our stories are embedded into a larger life narrative and the meaning that we give them may change throughout time (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Despite these limitations, it is important for individuals to tell stories and to share their experiences. Stories help to jog our memories, create opportunities for reflection, connect us with the past, and help us make plans for the future (Kramp, 2004).

### **Research Questions**

This research study addressed a gap in the body of literature, by seeking to uncover the long-term perceived growth of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology, the researcher gathered individual lived experiences of graduate

student study abroad program alumni. The following research questions guided this study:

- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their personal growth as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?
- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their career development as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?

By utilizing narrative inquiry in this study, the researcher collected individual lived experiences from graduate student study abroad alumni and from myself, a graduate student study abroad alumna.

### **Research Participants**

Participants in this study participated in a short-term, faculty-led student affairs graduate student study abroad program hosted by a large, degree granting university in the Southeastern portion of the US within an eight year period. During their study abroad experience, students were enrolled in a student affairs or higher education graduate level program at an institution of higher learning within the US.

Due to the small nature of the study abroad program being studied, a convenience sample was utilized. A convenience sample was utilized to conserve researcher resources, such as time, money, and effort (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to limited resources, the researcher chose to recruit participants who were



geographically located within a two-hour radius or who could be interviewed using FaceTime®. By controlling the accessibility to participants, the researcher was able to utilize face-to-face interactions with all participants. Further, participants were chosen based upon the richness of their information and for the experiences they could provide to the study (Patton, 2002) and their geographical location. Study participants were initially recruited via email using a database of past study abroad participant information (See Appendix F). Given that the data for this study was collected up to nine years after participants' study abroad experience, the researcher understood that some contact information for alumni would no longer be valid. Therefore, the researcher used personal relationships with graduate school colleagues and faculty to purposefully select and to successfully contact alumni to participate in the study. For this study, the researcher recruited and interviewed three participants. In addition, the researcher wrote and included her own narrative.

The participants within this study included three females and the researcher (See Appendix G). The first participant, Carman, was a White female in her thirties who studied abroad in England during the summer of 2011. Carman was employed at a large research institution in the South where she worked in career services.

Charlotte, the next participant, was a White female in her early thirties who studied abroad in Scotland during the summer of 2006. Upon finishing her Master's degree, Charlotte began working for a large research institution in their career

services office. However, during this study she worked at a small, private, liberal arts university in the South within career services.

Katniss, studied abroad in England during the summer of 2005. Katniss was a White female in her thirties. She was employed at a large, research university in the Midwest where she works in career services within a college of global business.

Lastly, the researcher was the fourth participant within this study. The researcher was a White female in her early thirties. Meredith studied abroad in England during the summer of 2005. She was employed at a large, research institution in the South where she worked in the field of education abroad. By including my own narrative in this study, I have conducted self-narrative or self-study as part of my research.

### ***Self-Narrative***

Studying oneself may be associated with many different terms but for this research study the researcher has chosen to employ the technique of self-narrative. A self-narrative is an individual's account of the relationship between events across time, while seeking to understand life events as they are systematically related (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). A personal narrative is meant to serve as an exemplar that serves as a critical evaluation of an individual's lived experience. The narrative is shared with readers to provide an articulation of a meaningful experience. (Alexander, 2005).

As noted by Richardson (2000), self-studies should: (1) make a substantive contribution, (2) provide aesthetic merit, (3) show reflexivity, (4) have an impact, and (5) create an expression of reality. Self-studies including these five criteria of quality validate the justification for including oneself in the research study. The inclusion of my narrative within this study is particularly important, as it adds to the richness of this study by creating an additional layer of depth and perspective.

Clandinin and Connelly (2007) wrote,

But well done self-study inevitably, because of the experiential base of the self knower, will transcend and be richer than similarly obtained collaborative narrative knowledge. Thus, our position s that self-study is important not for what it shows about the self but because of its potential to reveal knowledge of the educational landscape. Self-study holds the highest possible potential for improving education (597).

One criticism of self-study as noted by Ellis and Bochner (2000) is that personal narratives may portray a romantic version of one's self. However, the researcher must focus on being a story analyst as opposed to a storyteller in order to provide an analytical response to his or her own life experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Atkinson, 1997). In constructing my own narrative, I was very careful to share details about my study abroad experience and to triangulate the narrative with my personal journal, which was written while I was studying abroad. My narrative is raw and personal; and it addresses both highs and lows that I have experienced in life. This honesty and transparency within my narrative also adds to the credibility

of my story (Alvesson, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ellis and Bochner (2000) also noted that reliving the past can be a criticism in the eyes of skeptics.

Narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present. Stories show us that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate. Doesn't this mean that the stories we tell always run the risk of distorting the past? Of course, it does. After all, stories rearrange, redescribe, invent, omit, and revise. They can be wrong in numerous ways—tone, detail, substance, etc. Does this attribute of storytelling threaten the project of personal narrative? Not at all, because a story is not a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of one's life; it does not seek to recover already constituted meanings (p. 745).

Though it is virtually impossible to be objective when analyzing one's own lived experiences, Ellis and Bochner (2000) noted that it is important to move in and out of the emotional experience during the writing and analysis of a self-study. By writing inside of the experience, it is easier to evoke memories and emotions. However, the researcher must also know when to step outside of the experience to analyze their personal narrative as a socially constructed process.

### **Data Collection**

In collecting the data for this research study, the researcher followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) three phases of inquiry. The three phases include, orientation

and overview, focused exploration, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Upon receiving approval to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix H) the researcher began the first phase of inquiry. The first phase, orientation and overview, referred to the unstructured interview with study participants. The purpose of this phase was to allow participants to share information about their experience and to allow the researcher to make note of what information was worthy of follow-up (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During this phase, the researcher interviewed each study abroad returnee/research study participant in an unstructured interview to allow each participant's narrative to emerge naturally. By using unstructured interviews to collect data, the researcher was able to gather information about each participant's study abroad story and what happened to them after the experience. At the end of the interview the researcher was prepared to ask additional questions or use probes, if needed, to clarify participants' experiences.

The second phase of the inquiry, focused exploration, utilized structured interactions between the researcher and the research participants to gain more in depth information about prominent experiences that came out during the first phase. When entering into the second phase, the researcher had semi-structured protocols to ensure that the desired information was collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (See Appendix I).

The third phase of the inquiry focused on member checking. During this phase, the researcher compiled the data collected and presented to each participant

for review. The researcher used member checking to ensure accuracy after the interview transcripts had been transcribed and upon completion of the restorying process. This process was conducted to ensure that the researcher accurately captured the experiences of each participant. If any changes needed to be made to the data, the researcher took the necessary measures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Interview Protocol**

The intent of each interview was to engage study participants and to provide them with an opportunity to talk freely about their study abroad experience. In keeping with the temporality of narrative inquiry, the researcher sought to gain insight into the past, the present, and the future, as it related to each participant's study abroad experience.

Initially, the researcher asked study participants to share information regarding their study abroad experience and what happened to them after that experience. As each narrative began to emerge, the researcher used probes to ask participants for continuation, elaboration, and clarification to ensure that the researcher understood the responses. In addition, the researcher used probes to help steer the narrative stories when participants got off track during the interview. It was not possible for the researcher to determine the exact questions that would be used during each interview, as the organic flow of participant's stories guided the questions asked (See Appendix I). After the initial interviews were conducted, the researcher was prepared to conduct follow-up interviews if necessary.

Interactions with study participants were conducted in a face-to-face manner either in person or by using FaceTime®, a video chat software. The face-to-face interaction was important, as it provided the researcher with an opportunity to witness how each participant responded to questions asked and allowed the researcher to adapt interview questions and probes when necessary during the interview (Driscoll & Brizee, 2010). Face-to-face interviews also allowed the researcher to hear participants accounts of their study abroad experiences first-hand and to clarify questions and responses during the interview (Dialsingh, 2008; Driscoll & Brizee, 2010). Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and all interviews were audio recorded so the researcher was able to transcribe the data collected. The audio recordings and interview transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, each individual narrative was analyzed and coded to identify themes that emerged from participants' stories. Hand-coding each narrative identified themes within each story. To begin the coding process, I first read through each participant's narrative and made notes about themes that emerged (See Appendix J). After I identified initial themes from individual narratives, I cross-referenced the list to see which themes were the most prominent in all four narratives. There were four themes that surfaced as being the most prominent: self-confidence, appreciation for diversity, self-reflection, and career and learning

development. After compiling the list of four themes, I re-read through each interview transcript to identify specific passages that represented each theme. During this process, I used colored pens to identify representative passages within each narrative (See Appendix K).

Although generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, after individual themes were identified, the researcher used the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to look for commonalities throughout the four narratives. This technique allowed the researcher to compare the themes from each narrative and to identify overarching themes within the research findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as an inquirer being able to persuade their audience to pay attention to or take account of the study findings. Similarly, Ellis and Bochner (2000) wrote that stories should be “lifelike, believable, and possible” (p. 751). To achieve trustworthiness, it was necessary for the researcher to follow extra steps to ensure the stories were portrayed accurately. In constructing a trustworthy qualitative study the researcher ensured that the study was credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To assure the credibility of this study, the researcher utilized data triangulation to ensure that this research study was credible. Data triangulation is using multiple sources of data, “that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). The researcher utilized audio



recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, and participant journals to triangulate the data collected. While interviewing each participant, the researcher took field notes to refer back to during the re-storying process. An example of the researcher's field notes was included in Appendix L. Carman and Meredith's study abroad journal entries were woven into their narratives. In addition, the researcher included scanned copies of hand-written journals for Carman and Meredith in Appendices. The other two participants, Charlotte and Katniss, no longer had their study abroad journals, thus why there were not included. To further triangulate the data, the researcher utilized member checking to ensure the accuracy of data collected. Member checking was executed upon completion of the interview transcription process, and after the restorying process. Utilizing member checking throughout the data collection process helped to ensure the integrity and credibility of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) saw credibility and dependability as being one and the same. Thus, if a researcher produces a credible study, then it should not be necessary to also demonstrate the dependability separately.

Assuring the transferability of narrative and qualitative research studies was quite different than creating generalizability with quantitative studies. Within narrative research, readers determine the generalizability of a study based upon their ability to relate to the stories being told to themselves or others (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that in order to enhance the external validity of a study, the researcher must provide a rich

description of the story to help readers determine whether or not the story being told can be transferred.

Lastly, in order to ensure that the study was confirmable, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested that external audits be utilized. Having the data collection processes, data storage, and data analyses critiqued by an outside auditor, helped establish confirmability and also bolstered the dependability of the study. Thus, the researcher used peer checks to confirm readability and formatting within the study, faculty checks to ensure process accuracy and trustworthiness, and member checks to ensure the accuracy of each story shared. These checks were conducted throughout the research process to create a trustworthy study.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

Within this study I have many personal and emotional ties. As a graduate student, I participated in the same short-term, faculty-led program that I am studying. In 2005 I studied abroad in England where I took a graduate level course that examined the higher education system of the United Kingdom. At that time, I did not even conceptualize that the trip was a study abroad experience, but rather I saw it as an opportunity to take a trip to Europe. Nevertheless, this trip was very paramount in shaping my education, personal perspectives, and career.

Before studying abroad I had traveled to Europe on multiple occasions. However, I had never been exposed to such learning abroad prior to this experience. During my study abroad experience I was introduced to the culture of England and

the higher education system there. Our faculty facilitated discussions and reflection opportunities to assist with the learning process. While in England, as part of the course requirements, I kept a journal to make notes about the course content and to reflect upon my experience.

Upon my return to my home institution after my study abroad, I frequently referred to my experiences abroad in classroom discussions; and I had a passion for learning more about cultural differences within higher education! However, at that time, I did not fully conceptualize what had happened to me. There was no re-entry support or follow-up from faculty leaders or the study abroad office at my home university. I was left to sort out this experience on my own. Not knowing how this might impact me later, my experience came and went, in a sense.

After graduating from my graduate program, and working outside of a university setting, it became increasingly imperative to me that I find a job on a college campus that would allow me to work with students. During this time I realized that my passion was working with college students and impacting their lives the way that my life had been impacted while I was a student. When I began my job search, I came across a position opening for a Study Abroad Advisor. At that time, I honestly had no idea what the role of a Study Abroad Advisor was but ultimately decided that it sounded like a good fit for me. One of the job requirements specified that applicants must have participated in a study abroad experience. During the job interview I was able to talk about the impact that studying and

traveling abroad has had on my life. Ultimately my ability to quantify these experiences helped me secure the job.

In the seven years that I have worked as a Study Abroad Advisor, my office has sent over 5,000 students abroad and I have traveled to more than twenty countries. After traveling around the world by oneself a person quickly learns that he/she is capable doing anything! I have grown so much professionally and personally during my time in this position. Being a Study Abroad Advisor has helped me gain experience in crisis management, learn lessons from the students that I advise, and gain an immense amount of knowledge about other cultures.

However, this experience has also been very challenging for me. Little did I know how much this job entailed when I signed on; I have spent countless nights and holidays worrying about students and their well-being. I often work very long hours and fight to keep up with the fast-paced nature of the business. To say that this position has been a learning experience is an understatement, and throughout the process I have also learned so much about myself.

One of the things that I often think about is how I wish that I had taken advantage of a full-semester study abroad experience when I was an undergraduate student. Although I wanted to study abroad for a full-semester when I was in college, unfortunately, the options for study abroad were not nearly as diverse as they are now. In addition, little promotion was done to encourage students to take advantage of a study abroad experience on my campus. Had I taken advantage of a full-semester study abroad program, I think that I would be better able to relate to

the students that I advise; and I am envious of their ability to take advantage of this amazing opportunity.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter summarized the pilot study that informed the current dissertation study. Also, the chapter explained and justified the methodological approach and research design for this study. The researcher described the techniques utilized to recruit study participants, collect data, and analyze data. The researcher also stated her subjectivities and biases in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES**

#### **Organization of Chapter**

This chapter features the narrative stories of each study participant. This chapter is divided into four sub-chapters. Each sub-chapter is dedicated to the narrative of each participant, Carman, Charlotte, Katniss, and myself. Within each narrative, the researcher analyzed the story to provide insight about the themes, which emerged during the interview. In addition, the researcher included excerpts from Carman and Meredith's study abroad journals as a means of data triangulation. Charlotte and Katniss no longer had their study abroad journals, thus why entries were not included for either of them. Participant stories and journal entries are indicated in italics and the researcher's analysis is written in standard text. This designation is meant to help readers clearly see the multiple voices represented within each narrative.

#### **Carman**

Carman was a White female who studied abroad during the summer of 2011 while she was pursuing a Master's degree at a large, research-based institution in the South. After Carman finished her undergraduate degree, she taught high school English and served as a national consultant for her sorority before deciding to pursue her graduate degree.

*After I graduated with my bachelor's degree I began teaching high school English, and simultaneously, I worked as a sorority national consultant with my sorority. While working with college students through my sorority, I got to hear stories about study abroad. I didn't solicit the stories, but sorority members would share their experiences of re-entry with me. One of the sorority chapters that I worked with had a required study away. Members did not have to study abroad, but they had to study somewhere else. The chapter faced a challenge knowing that every single member would leave for at least one semester during her college career and then would each return and re-enter the chapter. It was often difficult for the current leaders and members to see what role a study abroad student would be good in because the proof wasn't right in front of them.*

Carman reflected on her work as a national consultant for her sorority. Not having studied abroad as an undergraduate student, Carman was not able to relate to or identify with the study abroad returnees like she would be able to now that she has had a study abroad experience of her own. Thus, Carman was not able to appreciate the benefits of a study abroad until she had experienced a study abroad program first-hand. She expressed this sentiment in the statement below in reference to study abroad returnees finding leadership positions within their sorority:

*Having thought about this several years later, the irony is she (the undergraduate study abroad alumni) was probably more qualified than*

*anybody else because of her study abroad experience. I guess I am older and wiser now, because I couldn't have given that advice back then.*

Working with undergraduate students who had returned from their study abroad experience and watching their re-entry process unfold, Carman was intrigued by study abroad and what the experience would be like. With her interest in study abroad peaked, Carman was excited to have her own study abroad experience when she started graduate school.

*While I was an undergraduate student, I was very involved on campus as an orientation leader, sorority president, dance team member, and university 101 co-instructor, but I didn't have an opportunity to study abroad as an education major. Outside of political science, international relations, and foreign language majors, study abroad was not widely advertised. If the opportunity was there, it wasn't advertised in my face. When I decided to go back to graduate school and I learned that there was an opportunity to study abroad, I was all over it. As an older graduate student, I was older and wiser and I took advantage of the opportunities that came my way.*

Here Carman expressed that study abroad was something that she was excited about as she embarked on her Master's degree. By starting graduate school as an older student, Carman knew that she wanted to make the most out of her graduate school experience. When she decided to study abroad, Carman took advantage of an opportunity that she had not taken advantage of previously. Carman also knew that the reward of studying abroad would outweigh the risk associated



with the experience and that it would be beneficial to her in the long run. Carman attributed her decision to study abroad on her maturity as compared to her younger classmates.

*This program was the experience of a lifetime partly because we got to travel with students from all over the country and share the experience together. "It was just so intriguing and rewarding to not only meet them but also go have the experience itself." Also, getting to visit different colleges and universities and seeing the dichotomy between them was very interesting.*

In this statement Carman expressed an appreciation for the diversity of the experience. Not only was the trip comprised of participants from graduate programs across the US, but also throughout the study abroad program participants visited various universities within England. Within the study abroad program, Carman was able to learn from and relate to others from around the world. These interactions provided her with a cross-cultural perspective, which she still reflects upon in her work today.

*I appreciated the opportunity to hear the conversations with UK student services staff and to realize that many of the challenges that they face are also challenges that we face, especially related to mental health. While we were in Bath, England, we had a very informal conversation where we sat around in a circle and just exchanged ideas and brainstormed. We didn't solve anything, but we just talked about and shared challenges that we face. While we're*

*different, we're not that different, you know, and there is an opportunity to kind of collaborate there.*

Below is an excerpt from Carman's journal she kept during her study abroad experience (See Appendix M):

*July 19*

*I think everyone enjoyed our time at XXX today. We were warmly welcomed immediately and received a lot of great information. The setting allowed for discussion, which was excellent. It allowed for a true sharing of information and experiences and rich dialogue. There was just a vibe of enthusiasm in the room that was energizing.*

While participating in the informal conversation during her study abroad experience, Carman had an "ah ha!" moment when she realized that student services and support transcend international borders. With the guidance and support of program faculty, the academic requirements also supported her cross-cultural growth and appreciation.

*While the trip was just for two weeks during July, all of the students in the program had to complete a proposal, paper outline, and then a final paper, which was submitted on the backend of the program. I think that the instructors' intentionality was for participants to prepare their research on the front end, reflect while abroad, dig deeper into the topic and get a first-hand experience on-site, and piece the two together on the back end. So, even though the trip was only two weeks, from start to finish, students probably actually*

*spent four or five months thinking about their experience. I think that this was very strategic and I think that's probably the only way to take a short-term experience and make it, you know, worthwhile.*

*In addition to the research assignment, all participants were required to keep a journal during the trip. Since we were traveling on buses, we had time to look out over the countryside, reflect on the day, and debrief while writing before we arrived at our next institution. I still have my journal, and I go back to it every now and then just to see if there's a nugget that has more meaning now than it did at the time.*

Reflecting upon one's study abroad experience is a means of reliving the experience, recognizing lessons learned and internalizing the experience. In Carman's narrative she often reflected about herself and her study abroad experience. There is no doubt that her time abroad impacted her outlook and view on life and the work that she does today.

*During my Master's degree I was a graduate assistant in the Career Center. So while I was studying abroad, this is the topic that I focused the most on. Upon graduation, I was offered a full-time position in the Career Center and there are pieces of the experience that I still think about today. The piece that I have taken away and have integrated into conversations is the concept of their first destination survey (the UK graduation survey) and how they get that data and how it relates back to the funding that they receive from the UK government. I think that the US is moving that way. The funding that we receive will*

*eventually be tied back to the results from our graduation survey. The way that I compare the UK to the US in meetings is that when your undergraduate institution calls you in the US, they are calling to solicit donations – they want money. However, when your institution calls you in the UK, they want to know where you got your first job placement, how much you are making, and things of that nature. I still think about this because in my current position we have to increase the response rate to our graduation survey. As we seek to increase our response rate, we need to look at our UK partners and learn from them.*

Carman recounted her visit to XXX's career services office and compared the experience to the career services office at her home institution in the journal entry below (See Appendix N):

*July 12*

*...XXX did a great job explaining the organizational structure and finances. The most significant difference between our career counselors and theirs was the amount of real world experience each has before becoming a counselor. They also have special areas where we work with all students. We do connect students with different counselors who have more knowledge in an area but still work with all students. There is also a strong connection between them and the employers. Where they will speak on behalf of a student, and we don't intervene in the application process, the relationship seems to be very similar. Internships don't carry the same weight in the states.*

*...The counseling services were interesting as well. It's good to know stigmas attached to receiving services is everywhere – they are just different. They appear to try and provide a wide variety of sessions for groups. I was surprised about the unlimited number of sessions being available. While it isn't always obvious – like us – there are definitely levels of counselors for the students like with their DOS.*

Carman has integrated her study abroad experience into her professional career with an appreciation for other cultures and their best practices. The experience has helped her develop a global professional perspective that impacts the work that she does. In addition, she has found ways to keep her study abroad experience relevant in her personal life by sharing the experience with others.

*Also, since graduating with my Master's degree, other study abroad alumni and I have had the opportunity to go back and speak to the current Master's students in their classes. The purpose of our presentation is to talk about the internationalization of student affairs. It has been nice to have an opportunity at least once a year to reflect on how we're using that study abroad experience today. During the presentations, we frame the conversation by stating, "we know all of you are not going to have the opportunity to study abroad if you haven't already done so" and we focus on the fact that in student affairs you will work with study abroad alumni and international students. In this role, as student affairs professionals, they need to understand what other educational systems in the world look like so that they can better reach those students. Also,*

*we stress the importance of helping students learn how to articulate what they've been through, how to reintegrate, and how to showcase their experience during job interviews. Not only does this opportunity allow me to reflect on my experience at least once a year, but it also allows me to learn from the other study abroad alumni who have participated in the program more recently than me.*

Keeping her study abroad experience alive and sharing the experience with others was something that Carman actively participated in. Her desire to ensure that this experience had a lasting impact was evident from start to finish. Carman started her graduate school career with a desire to make the most out of the opportunities that were put in front of her and she continued to do that. Now, she is utilizing the knowledge, skills, and perspectives gained to help inform her current professional career.

The themes that emerged from Carman's narrative are self-confidence and maturity, appreciation for diversity, cross-cultural learning, career and learning development and personal reflection. These themes were consistent with changes and growth experienced by study abroad alumni, as indicated in the literature review (Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Doyle, 2009; Norris & Gillespie, 2008).

## Charlotte

Charlotte was pursuing her Master's degree in student affairs at a large, research university in the South when she decided to study abroad in the summer of 2006. Charlotte was a White female in her early thirties who worked in career services at a small, private, liberal arts university in the South.

*The summer between my first and second year of graduate school, I had the opportunity to study abroad on a faculty-led program that occurred every year for higher education and student affairs students to tour an area of the United Kingdom (UK).*

*My study abroad experience was very comfortable compared to some students' experiences because we were traveling as a group, and I was with faculty from my home school. It wasn't like I was going to Scotland on my own and having to navigate through everything without a support system, but that was my first time in a foreign country and things were different. The experience made me realize that I could be across an ocean, hours and miles away from family and be OK with the experience.*

*The year that I went, we traveled to Scotland for ten days – two weeks and we had the opportunity to tour three different parts of the country. The duration of the trip was just right for me, even though it was a lot to process in a short period of time. It was kind of like a “gateway” experience that made me wish that I had studied abroad as an undergraduate student, even though I do not know if I would have been ready at the time.*

Charlotte's study abroad experience was the first time that she had traveled internationally. The duration of the program was not overwhelming to her, yet the trip also helped her realize that the risk of studying abroad was worth the reward. During her time abroad, she also realized that traveling was something that she was open to in the future. In addition, Charlotte's study abroad experience made her reflect upon her previous academic endeavors. During this reflection she openly admitted that she wished that she had taken advantage of a study abroad experience as an undergraduate "*even though I do not know if I would have been ready at the time.*" This statement indicated that maturity and life experiences had an impact on her decision to study abroad. According to Charlotte, being more mature and having more education under her belt likely impacted her learning during the experience, as well.

*During the trip, we had the opportunity to really see what student services were offered at each school, talk to colleagues at those schools, and compare the similarities and differences between colleges and universities in the United States (US) and in Scotland. Although in both countries we all have a desire to help students, the Scottish universities were not as far along as we were when it came to the level support and the variety of services provided to students. In Scotland, they advise students, they provide services to ensure that the students are comfortable and safe, and they offer campus programming, but it's just not quite as in depth as what we do here.*



From this experience, Charlotte was able to compare and contrast the UK and US student services offerings to make a cross-cultural comparison. Noting that the two education systems are quite different, she observed that both countries have a desire to help and support their students throughout the college experience. The same could be said about Charlotte's experience with her classmates who were from all over the US and the locals that she met while traveling.

*I had the chance to interact with other American students who were involved in student affairs programs throughout the US. There were three participants from my school and everyone else was from different schools, which was a very good thing because we had the chance to learn from each other, as well. I still stay in touch with a lot of the people that were on the trip.*

*I was open to trying new foods and experiencing a new culture, which made me realize that just because you're in another country, people aren't necessarily going to be extremely different from you. There are going to be things that you can relate to with others. After my program ended, I traveled to London for fun. While in London, I was so amazed by all of the diversity. London was the most diverse place I'd ever been. During this experience I had no choice but to get to know people who were different from me, whether they were in my travel group or were Scottish or English people that I met along the way.*

Meeting new people from different educational and geographical backgrounds enhanced Charlotte's experience abroad. The interactions that she had

with others helped Charlotte to gain an appreciation for diversity and also helped to prepare her for what was to come in her life.

*Upon graduation, I accepted a position to work in career services at a large institution in another state. So when I moved to a totally different state and lived in a much more diverse city from what I was used to I was more open to interacting with and learning about people who were different from me. The study abroad experience probably influenced me not to be so apprehensive about moving to a new city and taking a job away from home.*

*My study abroad experience was a great learning opportunity. I learned a lot from this experience and it helped me realize that I could take on challenges and experience a new place. In addition, It also made me realize that you may not know your way around the area, but you'll figure out where you need to go and what you need to do.*

As a result of her study abroad experience, Charlotte gained self-confidence, self-awareness, and holistic personal growth. The experience helped her be open to new and different experiences that might come her way in life and gave her the confidence to seize those experiences as they came her way. Charlotte's study abroad experience was impacting the work she did with students on a day-to-day basis.

*I have now moved back to XXX and I am working in career services. Within my current position, there is an indirect relationship with study abroad. As I work with students from a career guidance perspective, I try to help them realize the*

*benefits that their studying abroad had on them and encourage them to include the experience in their resumes and interviews. I also work with students on articulating their study abroad experience. This will help make them more marketable candidates for whatever they decide to do, whether it is applying to graduate school, full-time jobs, fellowships or anything else that they want to do after graduation. I want to make sure that they realize the benefit that studying abroad can have on their college experience and on their future.*

Having had a life-changing study abroad experience, Charlotte was well equipped to relate to and to advise students about the impact that their study abroad experience may have. Her first-hand knowledge also helped her build rapport with students as she worked with them. Not only did Charlotte's reflection of her study abroad experience impact the students that she worked with, but it also impacted her personal life.

*I still talk about the experience today with my classmates and friends from the program. I also reminisce about the experience through pop culture. Whether seeing the publicity of William and Kate or watching golf tournaments, it is fun to think back to my experience and to realize that I have been there and seen the places first-hand. My study abroad experience definitely made me excited about the possibility to travel abroad again. I haven't had the opportunity to do it yet, but you know, I'm not as apprehensive about that should the opportunity arise.*

As a result of her study abroad experience, Charlotte had the confidence and desire to take risks in life and to experience new places and cultures. Charlotte's gateway international experience had a lasting effect on her life, both personally and professionally. By reflecting upon the experience over the past eight years, she has been able to identify personal growth and a change in her worldview as a result of this experience. The themes that emerged from Charlotte's narrative were maturity, self-confidence, self-awareness, personal growth, cross-cultural learning, an appreciation of diversity, personal reflection, and career and learning development.

### **Katniss**

Katniss was a White female in her thirties who studied abroad during the summer of 2005 while she was pursuing a Master's degree at a large, research-based institution in the Midwest.

*I was getting my Master's of education degree in college student personnel, and I was looking for an opportunity to participate in during the summer between my first and second year of graduate school. It was common for students in my program to have some sort of internship or study abroad experience during the summer between their first and second years.*

Katniss was studying student personnel at a large university in the Midwest when she received an email about the study abroad opportunity. The email came at just the right time, and Katniss decided to apply to be a part of the experience.

*I received an email through a listserv that I was a member of about this two-week opportunity to study abroad in England and visit different institutions of higher education and learn more about the educational system in the United Kingdom (UK). After reading through the details, I decided to apply. I was most interested in the program because I was able to take a course as part of the program and transfer it back to my home university. The credits transferred back into my graduate degree as an elective course. Although cost was a factor in my ability to participate on the program, I was able to apply for some financial aid to help cover the cost of the experience. After I was accepted into the program, I corresponded with the faculty leaders and other students virtually before we all departed for the UK.*

Not only did Katniss decide to take advantage of this experience because it was common for students in her program to do so, but she also was able to take a course which transferred back to her graduate program. Although cost was an initial barrier, Katniss was determined to spend the summer of 2005 having an experiential education experience; and ultimately she found a way to make the finances work. As a result of her study abroad experience, Katniss identified three major takeaways from the program, which included learning about the UK education system, the experience of being in another country, and interactions with program participants and faculty.

*There are three major takeaways that I gained from this experience. One of the biggest takeaways was obviously learning about the educational system in*

*another country. We traveled to different types and sizes of institutions and were able to talk to faculty, staff, and students who attended the schools. I have always had an interest in global experiences, so this was really enlightening for me.*

*Another takeaway was simply being in a country and having a global experience. Being in another country and experiencing the culture, shopping, and the food was pretty amazing.*

*The third take away from the experience that was really impactful on me was the interactions with faculty from another institution, as well as my fellow students. My roommate was from XXX; and she worked at a university there in career services, which is the field that I am now in. I also got to interact with students from all across the United States who worked in a variety of areas within higher education. We spent quite a bit of time together and that was a really good experience.*

In this portion of the interview, Katniss identified an appreciation of the relationships and diversity that the trip offered her. By being from another university, Katniss was taught by faculty from the host institution and shared the experience with students from throughout the US. The varied perspectives and camaraderie added an additional layer to her experience.

In July of 2005, the London Tube system (subway) was bombed by terrorists. Though the terrorist attack did not have a direct effect on the study abroad program

that summer, program participants including Katniss and myself felt the indirect effect of the attack.

*It was a really interesting time in that they (the UK) had just had a terrorist attack on the subway system in London. This attack was internationally recognized, so it was a bit nerve wracking to travel to a place when something pretty scary had just happened. I mean, in retrospect, I think it was even a bigger deal than I realized at the time. One of the hotels that we stayed at had a nearby subway station still blocked off due to the incident. I found myself thinking through what had happened and trying to understand what was going on. Now when I think back, that's a pretty vivid picture in my mind.*

The study abroad program participants were aware of the situation in London, but it was not until the group arrived in London and saw the aftermath of the attack did reality truly set in. Looking back on the events that unfolded with older and wiser eyes, Katniss realized the serious nature of what she experienced. Nevertheless, she did not let the terrorist attack overshadow her study abroad experience. She continues to reflect upon her time in the UK and utilizes skills gained during her time abroad in her work today. Katniss now works at a large university in the Midwest within a college of business. Her role within their career services office allowed her to interact with students on a daily basis.

*In my current position, I work in a business college; and we partner closely with the office of global business. We have opportunities for short-term study abroad programs within our college. Having studied abroad on a two-week program, I*

*have experience with short-term programs and I understand how even a two-week experience can be very life changing.*

*Having had this study abroad experience also encourages me to encourage college students to study abroad. This is a conversation that I have quite a bit. I work in the field of career services and students are always trying to figure out what they're going to do to build their experience. I would say that it is very life changing to go abroad, especially for an extended period of time. Being immersed in the culture, learning from the experience, and interacting with students from other institutions make the experience what it is.*

*I spend a lot of time talking to students about paying attention to the experience they are having when they're abroad. We conduct a pre-departure orientation and talk to students about how studying abroad relates to careers. We do this because we also talk to a lot of employers and ask them if they prefer students who have had an international experience. Their feedback tends to be that it depends on what the students gets out of the experience and how they communicate that to their future employers. So we talk to students a lot about not just saying, oh, the food was good or it was amazing, but literally stating what they got out of the experience. Whether it be on a resume or in an interview, we encourage students to reflect on their experience and to think about how it relates to their career and what they want to do in life. This is a pretty cool part of my job.*



Having participated in a study abroad experience herself, Katniss knows the benefits that are directly related with the experience. Thus, when she talks to students, she has been able to share first-hand knowledge about why it is important for them to not only participate in a study abroad experience; but also to talk about their experience in an articulate manner. Since her study abroad experience, Katniss has also had professional opportunities to travel internationally.

*I also had an opportunity to go to Hong Kong for three weeks with a group of students to serve as a resident advisor on a study abroad program. The group was made up of undergraduate business students and MBA students. While in Hong Kong, the students did a consulting project for a company in-country. While I was there, I lived in the residence with the students and was there in case they needed anything. I also coordinated weekly meetings for the project leaders to communicate with our university to provide updates and issues. I participated in a lot of sightseeing and weekend experiences with the students. I don't think without having studied abroad that I would have been comfortable being a resource for the students. Europe is a place that is a little bit easier to feel comfortable in, and I really couldn't wrap my head around what it would be like to travel to Hong Kong. But I'm confident and comfortable enough in going abroad that I was able to go and try something new.*

Katniss' study abroad experience helped develop her self-confidence and willingness to try new things. Her personal growth as a result of her international experience has helped open doors for her to experience the world in a new way.

Not only did her study abroad experience contribute to Katniss' personal growth and career and learning development but also provided a gateway experience that has helped her connect with the students that she works with.

*In my current position, I work with students from other countries on a daily basis. When I studied abroad, I had to learn how to adapt to a new country and culture. Knowing what it is like to go to a different place that you do not know or understand helps my work with international students. I definitely think that if I had not had that study abroad experience, I wouldn't always understand the types of challenges that our students face. In addition, traveling to Hong Kong has also helped me connect with and better understand the Chinese students that I work with because I am familiar with their culture.*

Katniss' study abroad experience has altered her perspective on the world and the work that she does with students. Within the narrative of her experience, the themes that emerged included determination, an awareness for world events, an appreciation for diversity within the study abroad program, personal growth and increased self-confidence, and empathy for others.

### **Meredith**

Meredith, the researcher, was a White female in her early thirties who studied abroad during the summer of 2005 while she was pursuing a Master's of Education degree at a large, research institution in the South.

*It all began in February of the year 2000. My dad decided to take my mom and me along with him on a work trip to Paris. We traveled for 10 days together, stopping first in England and then making our way to the “city of lights”. I was a senior in high school at the time; and it is safe to say that after that experience I had officially “caught the bug”...the travel bug, that is.*

After traveling abroad for the first time, I never wondered if I would travel abroad again. Instead, I wondered when I would travel abroad again. The experience helped open my eyes to new cultures and experiences, and I knew that learning and seeing more was important to me.

*Throughout my undergraduate career, I spent time thinking and planning where I would go next. I wanted to study abroad, but I never prioritized that experience. I was too afraid of who and what I would miss at home and at school. I never stopped to think about what I would gain by spending a semester abroad.*

During my undergraduate career, I was very involved on campus like many students. I thought that by leaving the organizations that I was a part of that I would be forgotten or that I would miss out on leadership opportunities. I also was not encouraged to study abroad by my parents. They were ultimately nervous about the idea of my living in another country for a semester. There were too many unknowns for my parents; and I put my desire to travel aside for the time.

*Immediately after I graduated from undergrad, I began graduate school.*

*During my first year of my master’s program, I learned that my professors led a*

*trip to the UK (England) to learn about higher education during the summer. I was encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity by my parents, and I was very excited to have the chance to travel abroad again. I saw the experience as an opportunity for me to return to Europe – a place that I had grown to love. The program was 2 weeks long, and I had planned to stay an extra week and travel to Paris with a friend. With this excitement also came nervousness. Although I knew the faculty and one other participant, I was anxious about traveling with a group of people that I did not know.*

My participation on a short-term, faculty-led program was appealing to my parents because there were fewer questions about the experience in their minds. I was excited to have the chance to travel abroad again, and I jumped at the opportunity. But this was the first time that I had traveled without the comfort of my family, and I was anxious about being a part of a group that I did not know. This anxiety was likely related to my desire to be close to family and friends. Although I love traveling and seeing the world, I was (and still am) a homebody. I enjoy the comfort of home and breaking out of this shell was a big risk for me to take.

*Leading up to the experience, I was asked to serve as a graduate assistant for the trip. This designation meant that I helped prepare pre-departure and on-site orientations for the students on the trip and that I assisted the faculty on an as-needed basis throughout the experience. These responsibilities took the place of the research paper that the other participants completed. I was,*

*however, still required to keep a journal throughout the experience and participate in all group discussions.*

Serving as a graduate assistant on the trip was a great experience. By working closely with faculty and being responsible for projects throughout the trip my self-confidence really grew. During this experience, I realized that I was respected by my peers and the professional staff and I learned that my ideas were appreciated and valued.

*When I think back to my study abroad experience the one thing that always comes to mind is the time that we spent in Plymouth, England. XXX was the first school that we visited on the trip; and when I close my eyes, I can still visualize the whole experience. Plymouth, England, is where the Mayflower set sail – seeing the steps where the passengers boarded the Mayflower was amazing. I also distinctly remember the façade of a church in the middle of town that was left in ruins. It was as if the church had burned, and no one had ever taken away the debris. Beautiful. This was the first time that I truly felt like I was up close and personal with history. Plymouth is also where I had my first roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, sticky toffee pudding, and where I learned that gin could be delicious! From the start, I was captivated by Plymouth, and I immediately began plotting my future return to the UK.*

In my previous travels I had only visited large capital cities. This trip was comprised of visits to smaller cities and town within England and a few days of exploring in London. Visiting smaller cities, like Plymouth, gave me a taste of what

English culture actually looked like. I felt like I had an opportunity to immerse myself in the culture by meeting locals and by trying the local fare. During this experience I learned how much I enjoy visiting smaller cities and towns. To this day, I have an appreciation of the authenticity and cultural immersion that they offer to outsiders. As if the city of Plymouth had not already peaked my interests, our university tour quickly reminded me that this experience was going to be very enlightening.

*During our university tour at XXX I learned about the tradition of the University Unions in England. This was, by far, the most interesting and the most different university tradition that I witnessed. Just the idea that a university employs students to govern their university was mind blowing. In 2005 at XXX, the university union brought in 4 million GBP of which 2 million GBP was earned from the on-campus pub. Could you imagine students wanting to stay on campus to drink and party? At the conclusion of our university tour, we had lunch with faculty and staff from the XXX. I can still see myself standing by the window talking to a gentleman and asking him if they ever hired Americans to work there. Even at that time I knew that living and working abroad was something that I could see myself doing. And still today living and working abroad are things that I think of often, and I really hope I will get a chance to do!*

I have never been the type of person who colors inside of the lines. I enjoy thinking outside of the box and trying new things. The university tour at XXX, and

the other schools that we visited helped me see how different higher education is around the world. I also realized that there are many opportunities for sharing and collaboration among our universities because we each have unique strengths and weaknesses.

*While studying abroad, I feverishly took notes, both mentally and physically, of ideas that I thought we should try back at my university. I will never forget sitting in class and talking about the programming and education workshops that they used at XXX. In my mind they were (and are) very creative, and ridiculously simple to execute. I proudly shared with my classmates though the ideas were not nearly as impressive to them.*

In my role as a study abroad advisor, I now understand that this was re-entry culture shock. When I returned from my study abroad experience I was excited about the experience, I wanted to share it with others, but, if the people around you have not experienced something similar, it is very hard for them to relate to you and your experiences. As a study abroad alumni it can be very disheartening to realize that your friends and family are not as excited to learn about your experience as you are to share the experience. Upon my return to my home school, I think that I would have benefited from re-entry support from the faculty and/or campus study abroad office. Re-entry support would have provided me with the tools needed to process the experience and to understand the re-entry culture shock that I experienced.

*During the trip, I kept a journal to reflect on the experience as part of the course requirements. I also included personal antidotes and thoughts in the*

*journal. This journal has been packed away in a box since my study abroad program ended nearly nine years ago. In preparing to write my personal narrative, I read through my entries and reflected upon my study abroad experience. In reading through my final journal entry, I am able to see how transformative this experience was for me.*

Below is a transcript from my study abroad journal. Also, I have included a scanned copy of the journal entry below in Appendix O.

*July 28, 2005*

*I've gotten a lot more out of this trip than I expected. Not that I had low expectations, but it really has been a very unique experience. In our final group discussion, I realized how much I had learned about myself, about others, and about HE (higher education).*

*I have to admit that I was quite nervous about leaving to come on the trip. 10 years ago on June 28<sup>th</sup> my parents left with my sister to go to the hospital for her to have surgery. That was the last time that I saw my sister. Ever since that point, I've had a difficult time saying goodbye to people because I am afraid that one of us will not return. Since my sister's death I've also been very careful to not get overly attached to individuals – my way of “saving” myself pain and heartache in the long run. My parents are an obvious exception and somehow my boyfriend made his way into my heart, as well. I really believe that my sister found him for me. He is a lot like her in many ways and (he) has filled a void in my heart that had long been empty.*



*Having said all of this, knowing that I was saying goodbye to the 3 of them I was really frightened that I wouldn't be able to concentrate on the trip for thinking about them. But I have pushed myself to move on and to use this opportunity to the best of my ability. In many ways I have learned how strong I am as an individual. But at the same time how much I need the love and support that I get at home!*

*Once again in my life, this trip has tested my ability to let down my guard and get to know others and to learn to be more patient with people. I have surprised myself at my ability to take things with a grain of salt and not let them get in my way of having a good time. I tend to get stuck in my own world where I do things I enjoy and am surrounded by people who want to make me happy (yes, I am spoiled). But I worked hard during this trip to not always think about myself and to include others in my thoughts. I also tried hard to be very flexible during the trip. I also learned a lot about higher education and realized how grateful I am to have had the opportunities I have had in life. The outlets of expression and education opportunities I had at my undergraduate institution were really wonderful. I now have a greater awareness that not all students get these sorts of chances. I enjoyed seeing the long running traditions of Oxford and Cambridge, but also seeing up and coming universities like Hertfordshire and Plymouth. Although the trip was a whole lot packed into a short amount of time, I truly believe it was a once in a lifetime experience to see so much and to learn so much.*

When I read through this journal entry recently, I was left in tears. I did not realize the impact that this experience had on me. In preparing to study abroad, I was also forced to confront my sister's death, something that I had never really dealt with. The thought of leaving home without my parents or my boyfriend at the time that is now my husband was truly frightening to me, but the experience helped me grow and to put my sister's death behind me, in a sense. My time abroad made me realize that I am strong enough to take on challenges and with the risk comes great reward. This experience also provided me with an opportunity to self-reflect. By using personal reflection, I realized that I am an individual who is grounded by the support and comfort of home, but I am also a person that seeks to experience new things in life and I want to share those experiences with others.

*Nearly nine years later, I am still reflecting on this experience. I am now a study abroad advisor and I use my personal experiences to help me relate to students everyday. I feel very fortunate to have found a career that allows me to dream big, to work with people from all over the world, and to help students take advantage of a life changing experience, too.*

My study abroad experience has directly impacted my professional career. Without having studied abroad, I would not be in this position today. My personal travel stories, experiences, and frustrations are what help connect me to the students that I work with each and every day. In this position, I also realize how much I can learn from the students, too. We live in an ever-changing world and sharing experiences and best practices is helpful for all of us. In addition, my study

abroad experience helped to prepare me to work with colleagues from around the world and to recognize the cultural differences within our work settings. Although our main goal is to support student mobility, we all approach the goal differently. Having an understanding and an appreciation of our differences helps me to be a better study abroad advisor, friend, and colleague.

Within my personal narrative, seven over-arching themes emerged. These themes included: anxiety and risks, heightened self-confidence, cultural immersion, cross-cultural learning, culture shock, personal reflection, and an appreciation for diversity.

### **Chapter Summary**

The narratives of the study participants yielded many themes and unique experiences. However, after comparing the narratives of Carman, Charlotte, Katniss, and myself, there were four similar experiences and themes that appeared. Each participant experienced heightened self-confidence, obtained an appreciation for diversity, used self- reflection to internalize their experience, and grew professionally as a result of their study abroad experience.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

As the field of international education grows, so does the need for research to support the value of study abroad experiences. While the current base of literature has addressed the impact of study abroad experiences on undergraduate students, studies have not examined the impact of study abroad experiences on graduate students. This research study examined the lived experiences of four former graduate student study abroad participants in order to fill a gap in the literature. The goal of this study was to determine if graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led program experienced personal and career growth as a result of their study abroad experience. In this chapter the study findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the study as well as limitations, conclusions and implications for practice and future research.

#### **Purpose of Study**

This study sought to uncover the long-term perceived growth of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program. By interviewing students up to nine years after their study abroad experience, the researcher hoped to gain insight about the perceived personal and career growth of graduate student study abroad program alumni. Because this research study focused on graduate students' perceived growth as related to their study abroad

experience, the study fills a gap in the current literature base. The results of this study will inform international educators and study abroad faculty leaders on the outcomes that graduate students gain from studying abroad.

### **Research Questions**

This research study addressed a gap in the body of literature, by seeking to uncover the long-term perceived growth of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology, the researcher gathered individual lived experiences of graduate student study abroad program alumni. The following research questions guided this study:

- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their personal growth as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?
- How do graduate student study abroad participants perceive their career development as a result of their short-term, faculty-led study abroad experience?

By utilizing narrative inquiry in this study, the researcher collected individual lived experiences from graduate student study abroad alumni and from myself, a graduate student study abroad alumna.

## **Discussion in Relation to Theoretical Framework**

The theories that grounded this study were Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1984; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012) and Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) (Krumboltz, 2009). Together these theories supported the assumptions that student learning occurs inside of and outside of classroom settings and that learning is an ongoing process that individuals encounter in formal and informal ways. Study abroad programs present students with a myriad of learning settings and experiences throughout their time abroad. This study concluded that the graduate students who participated in the short-term, faculty-led study abroad program, that was part of this study, experienced four types of growth. The common types of growth included self-confidence, an appreciation for diversity, self-reflection, and career and learning development. These themes are consistent with the growth experienced by undergraduate study abroad participants as indicated in the literature review (Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Doyle, 2009; Norris & Gillespie, 2008). Below each of the common themes that emerged are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework that grounded this study.

### **Self-Confidence**

An increase in self-confidence emerged as a theme among all study participants. Although the goal of this study abroad program was not for participants to become more self-confident, per se, the experience did provide

participants with an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zone and experience something new. In her narrative Charlotte said:

*My study abroad experience was a great learning opportunity. I learned a lot from this experience and it helped me realize that I could take on challenges and experience a new place.*

*The study abroad experience probably influenced me not to be so apprehensive about moving to a new city and taking a job away from home.*

By navigating a new culture, completing academic requirements, and reflecting on the experience, participants realized that they were able to successfully take risks in their lives and reap the long-term rewards. During her narrative interview, Katniss talked about traveling to Hong Kong for work. She shared:

*Europe is a place that it a little bit easier to feel comfortable in, and I really couldn't wrap my head around what it would be like to travel to Hong Kong. But I'm confident and comfortable enough in going abroad that I was able to go and try something new.*

This statement validated the long-term benefit of increased self-confidence that Katniss experienced.

Because study abroad participants are faced with adapting to a new culture and navigating through a new life experience, in the end they feel more confident in their ability to take on new challenges and tasks in life. The increase in self-confidence experienced by study abroad participants will have lasting effects on

their life for years to come. An increase in self-confidence was also found in previous study abroad research studies (Doyle, 2009; Norris & Gillespie, 2008).

Both ELT (Kolb, 1984) and HLT (Krumboltz, 2009) suggested that individuals utilize their life experiences to build the knowledge, skills, interests and beliefs they use to construct their worldview. Thus, both theories supported the finding that the experience of studying abroad and the skills gained during the time abroad directly impacted each participant's confidence to successfully navigate new and different experiences.

### **Appreciation for Diversity**

Interactions with peers from other US colleges and universities, program faculty, and host country natives provided the participants of this study with an opportunity to learn from diverse individuals on a daily basis. In their narratives participants noted an appreciation for the diversity that this trip offered. By visiting different institutions of higher education in another country and sharing the experience with individuals from unique US academic backgrounds, the trip was a learning experience for everyone. Positive interactions with others contributed to each individual's learning experience and enhanced their appreciation for diversity in life (Krumboltz, 2009). As noted in her narrative, Charlotte shared that her interactions with diversity abroad helped to create a smoother transition when she moved to a different state for work. Charlotte recounted:



*During this experience I had no choice but to get to know people who were different from me, whether they were in my travel group or were Scottish or English people that I met along the way.*

*Upon graduation, I accepted a position to work in career services at a large institution in another state. So when I moved to a totally different state and lived in a much more diverse city from what I was used, to I was more open to interacting with and learning about people who were different from me.*

Similarly, Katniss shared that her international experiences have contributed to her ability to relate to and empathize with the students that she encounters on a daily basis. Katniss stated:

*When I studied abroad, I had to learn how to adapt to a new country and culture. Knowing what it is like to go to a different place that you do not know or understand helps my work with international students. I definitely think that if I had not had that study abroad experience, I wouldn't always understand the types of challenges that our students face.*

Thus, participants reported the diversity of this study abroad program has had long-term, direct implications on their personal and professional lives.

ELT (Kolb 1984; 2012) outlined that the environment where learning occurs is directly related to the knowledge gained and growth experienced by learners. Because the participants of this study traveled abroad with peers from other US colleges and universities in another country they were predisposed to a diverse experience. In addition, the participants of this study were exposed to a variety of

cities, cultures, and universities in the UK during their time abroad. All of these variables combined provided a learning environment that directly contributed to the knowledge and appreciation of diversity gained.

Study abroad experiences provide participants with many opportunities to interact with and learn from diverse individuals. Whether participants are trying new foods, meeting new host country friends, or studying the cultural differences between their home and host country, study abroad participants are likely to come away from the experience with diverse experiences. Having experienced diversity while abroad, study abroad alumni are likely to be more willing to surround themselves with diverse experiences later in life. Their previous exposure to new people, cultures, and ideas will contribute to their confidence in trying new things and exploring new knowledge later in life.

### **Self-Reflection**

Keeping a written journal about the program and participating in required small group discussions were academic requirements of this study abroad program. Participants were encouraged to journal on a daily basis and to write about personal and academic observances. This portion of the study abroad experience allowed participants to formally reflect on their study abroad program and their learning throughout their time abroad. In her final journal entry of the study abroad program, Meredith wrote, *“In many ways I have learned how strong I am as an individual. But at the same time how much I need the love and support that I get at*

*home!"* By actively reflecting upon her experience abroad, Meredith realized that she could successfully take on risks in life while receiving love and support from home.

Participants in this study also noted that their interactions with others and their cultural experiences caused them to take notice of themselves. Thus, self-reflection was happening formally and informally as a result of the experience. According to participants the emotions and experiences encountered during their time abroad has contributed to the professionals they are today (Krumboltz, 2009). Similarly, because that all learning is re-learning, as study abroad participants actively reflected upon their experience, they were able to continue to internalize the experience and identify applicability in their life (Kolb, 1984). One example of continued self-reflection was Carman. During her interview, Carman stated:

*Also, since graduating with my Master's degree, other study abroad alumni and I have had the opportunity to go back and speak to the current Master's students in their classes. The purpose of our presentation is to talk about the internationalization of student affairs. It has been nice to have an opportunity at least once a year to reflect on how we're using that study abroad experience today.*

With her continued self-reflection, Carman has continued to learn and grow from her study abroad experience.

Self-reflection is an important part of study abroad. Actively reflecting upon the experience during and after an individual's time abroad will help participants to internalize the experience and to make meaning of their time abroad. Continuous

self-reflection will also provide study abroad participants with an opportunity to gain perspective on their study abroad experience. Knowledge gained while abroad might not be applicable to a study abroad participant immediately following their experience. However, with reflection months or years after their experience, study abroad alumni may be able to better connect the dots of their experiences abroad.

### **Career and Learning Development**

Although the participants of this study did not state that their study abroad experience directly impacted their career choice, the participants did note that their study abroad experience had impacted their day-to-day work. The skills gained and experiences obtained have had an impact on the participants' life choices. Because the participants were enrolled in a Master's degree program during their study abroad experience, it is likely that they already knew the career path that they wanted to take in life. However, participants perceived that their study abroad experience led to new lessons and insights that have had a lasting impact on their professional lives.

Carman stated that she still reads through her journal to search for ideas and as a result of her study abroad. Carman specifically stated:

*During my Master's degree I was a graduate assistant in the Career Center. So while I was studying abroad, this is the topic that I focused the most on. Upon graduation, I was offered a full-time position in the Career Center, and there are pieces of the experience that I still think about today. The piece that I have*

*taken away and have integrated into conversations is the concept of their first destination survey (the UK graduation survey) and how they get that data and how it relates back to the funding that they receive from the UK government. I still think about this because in my current position we have to increase the response rate to our graduation survey. As we seek to increase our response rate, we need to look at our UK partners and learn from them.*

Katniss has also experienced professional growth and development as a result of her study abroad experience. She decided to take advantage of the opportunity to travel to Hong Kong to serve in a support role for students she works with in her current job. When talking about this experience, Katniss said:

*I also had an opportunity to go to Hong Kong for three weeks with a group of students to serve as a resident advisor on a study abroad program.*

*I don't think without having studied abroad that I would have been comfortable being a resource for the students. Europe is a place that it a little bit easier to feel comfortable in, and I really couldn't wrap my head around what it would be like to travel to Hong Kong. But, I'm confident and comfortable enough in going abroad that I was able to go and try something new.*

As the participants reflected upon their experience, their ability to identify opportunities for professional growth and development has made the experience come full-circle.

HLT (Krumboltz, 2009) supports the idea that all experiences in life can facilitate learning opportunities that may contribute to an individual's career decisions in life. Studying abroad provided the participants of this study with an opportunity to interact with different cultures and to practice self-reflection during the experience. The risk of stepping outside of their comfort zone empowered participants to take on new tasks and challenges within their work settings.

### **Limitations of Study**

While the findings of this study do help inform the body of literature, there are limitations to the study. The goal of this study was to collect the lived experiences of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program and to convey the research findings in a narrative story format, allowing readers an opportunity to immerse themselves into the participants' experiences. The scope of this study was also a limitation within the study. Qualitative research methods seek to appreciate the uniqueness of each participant while not expecting to generalize the results. In addition, this study addressed one short-term, faculty-led study abroad program at one university in the US. Having additional data from larger and more diverse graduate student populations would help to inform the literature base further.

Other study limitations included limited access to study participants due to time, resources, and an inability to track down study abroad participants up to nine years after their experience. Although the researcher was able to review two of the

four participants' study abroad journals, having all participant journals would have added to the trustworthiness of this study. In addition, all study participants were White females in their thirties. Although future studies would benefit from participant diversity, in the current literature White females do represent the highest percentage of study abroad participants (Institute of International Education, 2013).

Another limitation of this study was not being able to interview all participants in person. Of the three interviews conducted, one interview was completed using FaceTime®. There are several studies that question the legitimacy of utilizing synchronous technology to collect data (Sullivan, 2012; Berg, 2007). Lastly, being a novice researcher was also a limitation to this study.

### **Conclusions**

This study sought to discover the long-term perceived personal growth and career and learning development that graduate students experienced as a result of participating in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program. The study concluded that graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led program experienced four types of growth that included self-confidence, an appreciation for diversity, increased self-reflection, and career and learning development. These themes are consistent with growth experienced by undergraduate students as found in the review of literature (Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Doyle, 2009; Norris & Gillespie, 2008).

Participants in this study indicated that their study abroad experience impacted their day-to-day work with students, but they did not indicate that their study abroad directly impacted their career choice. Because all participants were seeking a Master's degree during their study abroad experience, it is likely that they had already been socialized in the field of student affairs and knew what career path they wanted to take.

By studying the individual narratives of graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program, this study fills a gap in the literature. The utilization of narrative inquiry as a means of studying student experiences through the lens of Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 1979; 2009) sets this study apart from others. The researcher provided pertinent information that informs study abroad program faculty and staff about the implications of graduate student participation in short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs.

### **Implications for Practice**

As the number of graduate students who participate in study abroad programs continues to grow, it is vital that international educators, student participants, study abroad program faculty and staff, and other study abroad constituents know the implications of graduate student participation in study abroad experiences. Having data to support student growth helps study abroad



program faculty and staff appropriately support graduate students before, during, and after their study abroad experience.

### **Pre-departure Support**

By providing adequate pre-departure orientation and support, study abroad faculty and staff can help to prepare students for their study abroad experience. Topics of discussion in pre-departure orientation might include diversity, personal reflection, and culture shock. Graduate students make up a very diverse population on US college and university campuses. Graduate students are more likely to be non-traditionally aged students, international students, commuter students, working in addition to going to school, and pursuing a degree which is taught in a more condensed amount of time. It is important for study abroad faculty and staff to be cognizant of the nuances of graduate student populations when they are preparing students for their time abroad. While preparing students for the experience is very important, it is equally as important for study abroad program faculty and staff to support participants during and after their experience, as well.

### **On-site Support**

One way that study abroad faculty and staff can support graduate students during their time abroad is by encouraging them to actively reflect upon their time abroad. Including opportunities for self-reflection within the program will help participants to begin the process of internalization. Activities that provide self-

reflection might include small group discussions, written journals or blogs, and other reflective writing assignments. Actively reflecting on their study abroad experience as it unfolds provides participants with resources to help them articulate their experience after the fact. By understanding the role self-reflection plays, study abroad program leaders and study abroad staff can adapt their curriculum to help participants get the most out of their study abroad experience. Self-reflection can also be a beneficial tool for study abroad participants to utilize after their study abroad experience is over.

### **Re-entry Support**

Creating intentional re-entry programming will assist graduate students in finding opportunities to utilize their study abroad experience in their academic, personal, and professional lives. Study abroad staff should work with faculty and staff to provide proper training and support as re-entry programs are developed. Study abroad faculty and staff should partner with other campus offices such as career services and the graduate school to help students process their study abroad experience after they return to their graduate studies. Re-entry support services may include access to re-entry conferences, opportunities to interact with international students on campus, and workshops to help participants utilize their experience in their resume and interviews. Assisting graduate student study abroad returnees in learning how to articulate their experiences also helps participants see the applicability of the study abroad experience on their personal and career

pursuits. This information is vital to help build the knowledge base of the impact of study abroad programs on graduate student participants.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study presented the lived experiences of four former graduate students who participated in a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program. While the findings of this study did conclude that graduate student study abroad participants experienced perceived personal growth and career and learning development, additional research is needed to address this subject.

Specifically, additional long-term studies would help to identify the long-term perceived growth that a study abroad experience has on graduate student participants. By collecting identifying participant data before, during, and after the study abroad program ends future researchers will be better able to analyze participant growth over the long-term.

This study identified specific themes that emerged from participants' narratives. Each theme warrants additional research and further questioning. Interesting questions for future research include how participants perceive diversity prior to a study abroad experience and how participant perceptions on diversity change after the program ends. Also, asking participants what role self-reflection played in their study abroad experience would help guide future study abroad program creation and implementation.

Given that the body of literature that addresses the impact of study abroad experiences on graduate students is nascent, any future studies about this topic will make a needed contribution to the field of international education. As the number of graduate students who participate in study abroad experiences grow, it is necessary for additional research to be conducted. Further, the interviews for this study were conducted utilizing face-to-face interviews and FaceTime®. Future studies could assess whether or not there are any differences in interviews conducted using virtual applications like FaceTime® as opposed to in-person interviews.

Graduate students represent many demographics that are distinctly different from undergraduate students. Therefore, future studies could investigate the outcomes of graduate student study abroad experiences as related to diversity and demographics. When studying the experiences of graduate students, future researchers may inform their studies by utilizing research and data related to Peace Corps volunteers and Fulbright Award recipients, as these programs are targeted as graduate experiences. International educators, study abroad program faculty and staff, and student participants need to know the implications of studying abroad in order to better support graduate students before, during, and after their experiences.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study and addressed the findings in relation to the theoretical framework that grounded this study. Further, the

chapter addressed the limitations of this research study. Lastly, the chapter outlined the implications of this study on the field of international education and on future research related to graduate student study abroad experiences.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

Table 1

Profile of US Study Abroad Students, 2001/02 – 2011/12

Academic level	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Master's Students	4.7	4.8	4.1	3.4	4.8	5.9	6.3	6.6	8.1	8.5	8.3
Graduate, Professional	-	-	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.6
Graduate, Unspecified	3.3	3.4	2.4	3.4	3	2.6	2	2.6	2.5	2.1	1.9
Doctoral Students	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.7
Total Percentage	8.7	9.1	8.6	8.9	10	10.5	10.5	11.8	13.6	13.5	13.5

Institute of International Education (2013).

## Appendix B

Table 2

Duration of US Study Abroad, 2001/02 – 2011/12

Duration of Study	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Summer Term	34.4	32.7	37	37.2	37.2	38.7	38.1	35.8	37.8	37.7	37.1
One Semester	39	40.3	38.1	37.5	36.9	36.3	35.5	37.3	35.8	34.5	35
8 Weeks or Less During Academic Year	7.3	9.4	8.9	8	9.5	9.8	11	11.7	11.9	13.3	14.4
January Term	6	5.6	5.7	6	5.4	6.8	7.2	7	6.9	7.1	7
Academic Year	7.8	6.7	6	6	5.3	4.3	4.1	4.1	3.8	3.7	3.2
One Quarter	3.9	3.8	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.1	3	2.5
Two Quarters	0.5	0.4	0.5	1.3	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Calendar Year	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.5	1.3	0.1	0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.3

Institute of International Education (2013).



## Appendix C

### EDC 840 Study Abroad in England Pre-participation Survey

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**To what extent have the following objectives influenced your desire to participate in this study abroad program?**

	Not at all	Somewhat	Well	Very well
1. To make academic progress	—	—	—	—
2. To improve my career prospects	—	—	—	—
3. To grow personally	—	—	—	—
4. To learn about other cultures	—	—	—	—

**Please answer the following items by the identified Key.**

**Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, NA=Not applicable**

	SD	D	A	SA	NA
<b>5. I believe the following factors will influence the way I will be treated in England:</b>					
A. Physical appearance	—	—	—	—	—
B. Ethnicity / heritage	—	—	—	—	—
C. Sexual orientation	—	—	—	—	—
D. Gender	—	—	—	—	—
E. Identity as an American	—	—	—	—	—
F. Disability	—	—	—	—	—
G. Other (please specify) _____	—	—	—	—	—

**To what degree do you agree with each of the following statements?**

	SD	D	A	SA	NA
6. I am aware of issues in Higher Education in England	—	—	—	—	—

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. I have an understanding of historical, cultural and some traditions and achievements of Higher Ed in England | — | — | — | — | — |
| 8. I believe that there are many similarities in Higher Education between England and the US.                   | — | — | — | — | — |
| 9. I desire to meet and interact with people in England   | — | — | — | — | — |
| 10. I have an understanding of the cross-cultural issues I encountered in England                               | — | — | — | — | — |

**Please answer the following questions:**

Of the different preparatory/orientation opportunities provided for you thus far, what do you believe has been **the most useful** in preparing for this study abroad experience?

Of the different preparatory/orientation opportunities provided for you thus far, what do you believe has been **the least useful** in preparing for this study abroad experience?

Do you anticipate feeling like you will be considered part of a minority, or a majority in England? Please explain.

What is the primary benefit that you feel you will derive from participation in the program?

What do you think is special about having the course conducted in another country?

What cultural differences do you anticipate encountering while in England?

## Appendix D

### EDC 840 Study Abroad in England Post-participation Survey

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Were the objectives met for the reasons you decided to participate in this study abroad program?**

	Not at all	Somewhat	Well	Very well
1. To make academic progress	—	—	—	—
2. To improve my career prospects	—	—	—	—
3. To grow personally	—	—	—	—
4. To learn about other cultures	—	—	—	—

**Please answer the following items by the identified Key.**

**Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, NA=Not applicable**

	SD	D	A	SA	NA
<b>5. I believe the following factors influenced the way I was treated in England:</b>					
A. Physical appearance	—	—	—	—	—
B. Ethnicity / heritage	—	—	—	—	—
C. Sexual orientation	—	—	—	—	—
D. Gender	—	—	—	—	—
E. Identity as an American	—	—	—	—	—
F. Disability	—	—	—	—	—
G. Other (please specify) _____	—	—	—	—	—

**To what degree do you agree with each of the following statements?**

	SD	D	A	SA	NA
6. I am aware of issues in Higher Education in England	—	—	—	—	—

7. I have an understanding of historical, cultural and some traditions and achievements of Higher Ed in England — — — — —

8. I believe that there are many similarities in Higher Education between England and the US. — — — — —

9. I desire to meet and interact with people in England — — — — —

10. I have an understanding of the cross-cultural issues I encountered in England — — — — —

**Please answer the following questions:**

Of the different preparatory/orientation opportunities provided for you, what do you believe was **the most useful** in preparing for this study abroad experience?

Of the different preparatory/orientation opportunities provided for you, what do you believe was **the least useful** in preparing for this study abroad experience?

Did you ever feel like you are considered part of a minority, or a majority in England? Please explain.

What is the primary benefit that you feel you derived from participation in the program?

What was special about having the course conducted in another country?

What cultural differences did you encounter that you would have liked to have known about beforehand?

If you could tell one thing about this program to your friends, what would it be?

## Appendix E

### Pilot Study Findings in Graph Format

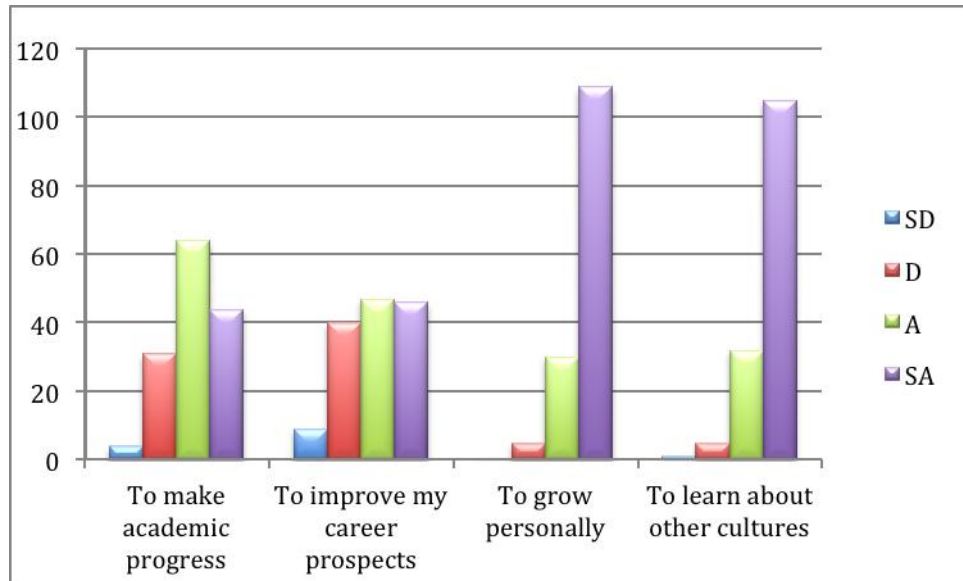


Figure 1. Why did students choose this study abroad program? This figure illustrates students' responses to the pre-program survey.

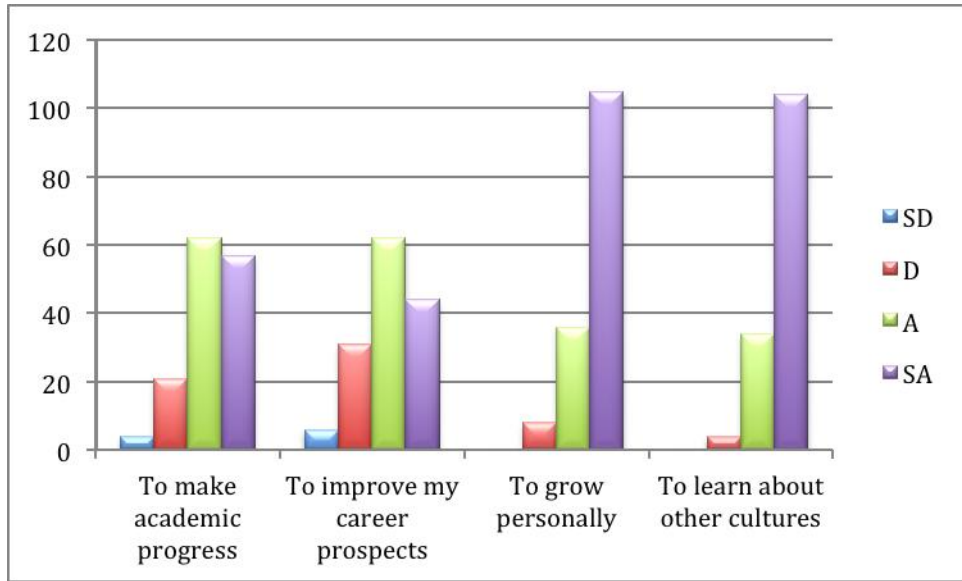


Figure 2. Why did students choose this study abroad program? This figure illustrates students' responses to the post-program survey.

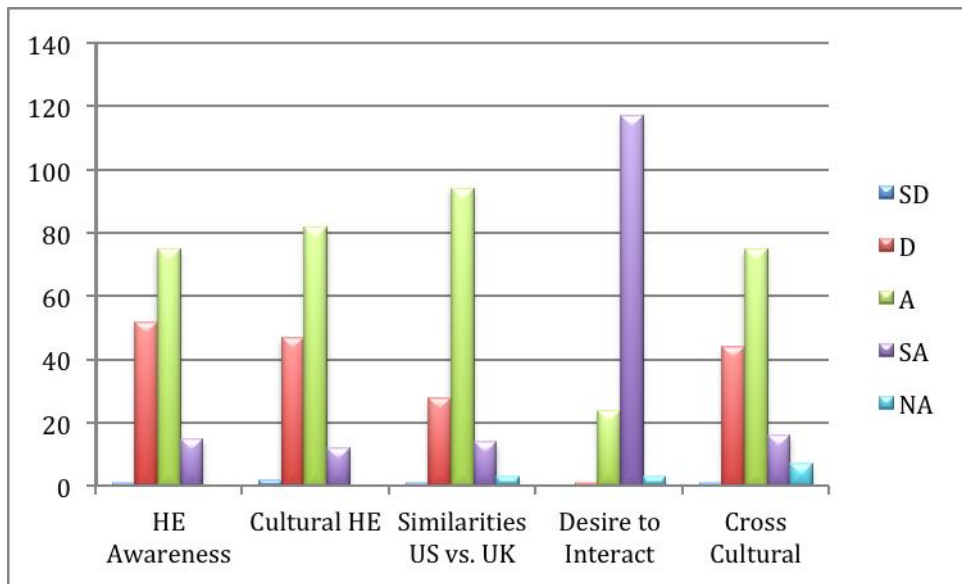


Figure 3. Student perceptions of their own knowledge about higher education and culture. This figure illustrates students' responses to the pre-program survey.



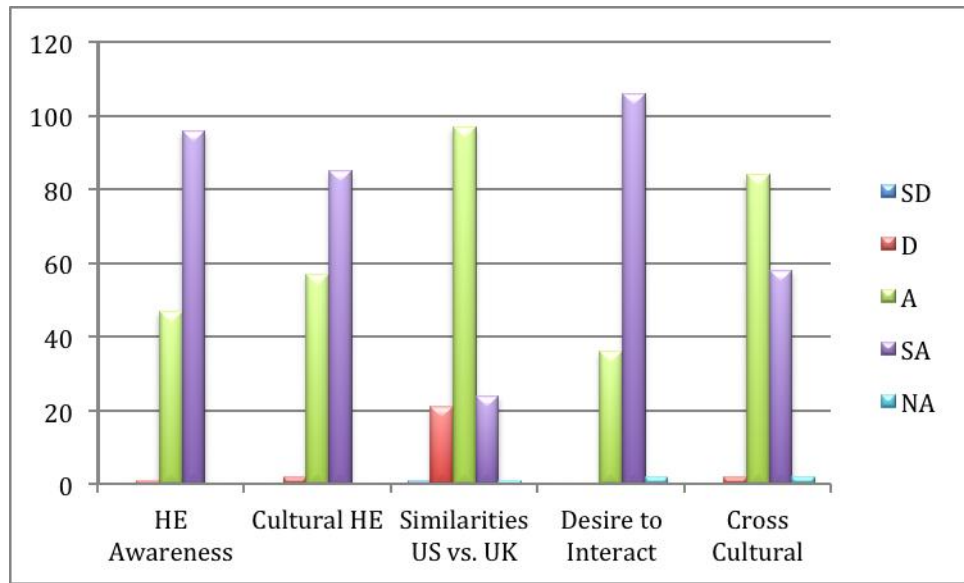


Figure 4. Student perceptions of their own knowledge about higher education and culture. This figure illustrates students' responses to the post-program survey.

## **Appendix F**

### **Email to Recruit Study Participants**

Dear UK Higher Education Program Study Abroad Alumni,

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about graduate student study abroad participants. This study is being conducted by Dr. Pamela Havice and Meredith Fant Wilson at Clemson University as part of Meredith Fant Wilson's doctoral research. This study will consist of 1-hour narrative interviews to collect stories of graduate student study abroad returnees.

Your contact information was obtained utilizing a study abroad database containing the information for all study abroad alumni.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please email Meredith Fant Wilson at [meredithfantwilson@gmail.com](mailto:meredithfantwilson@gmail.com). A request for additional information does not obligate you to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for considering this research opportunity.

Meredith Fant Wilson

## Appendix G

### Snapshot of Participants

Table 3

Snapshot of Participants

	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Summer Abroad</b>	<b>Study Abroad Country</b>
Carman	White	30s	2011	England
Charlotte	White	30s	2006	Scotland
Katniss	White	30s	2005	England
Meredith	White	30s	2005	England

## Appendix H

### Institutional Review Board Approval

**Pamela Havice**

---

**From:** Nalinee Patin  
**Sent:** Friday, September 27, 2013 4:36 PM  
**To:** Pamela Havice  
**Cc:** Meredith Wilson  
**Subject:** Validation of IRB2013-298: Life after Study Abroad...  
**Attachments:** IRB2013\_298\_Havice\_info\_ltr1.doc

Dear Dr. Havice,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on **September 27, 2013** that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt** under category **B2**, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. The approved consent document is attached for distribution. **Your protocol will expire on May 31, 2014.**

The expiration date indicated above was based on the completion date you entered on the IRB application. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html>, at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the new procedures, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html>.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the "Responsibilities of Principal Investigators" and the "Responsibilities of Research Team Members" available at <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html>.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.

All the best,  
Nalinee

*Nalinee D. Patin*  
IRB Coordinator  
Clemson University  
Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Voice: (864) 656-0636  
Fax: (864) 656-4475  
E-mail: [npatin@clemson.edu](mailto:npatin@clemson.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/>  
IRB E-mail: [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu)

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## **Appendix I**

### **Narrative Interview Questions**

The intent of this interview is to engage the study abroad program alum and to provide them with an opportunity to talk freely about their study abroad experience. Initially, I will ask the study participants to share information with me regarding their study abroad experience and what sparked their interest in pursuing this experience. During this time, I hope to gain rapport and trust with each participant to ensure they feel comfortable sharing their experiences with me.

As each narrative begins to emerge, I will use probes to ask the participants for continuation, elaboration, and clarification to ensure that I understand the responses provided. In addition, I will use probes to help steer the narrative if the participant gets off track during the interview. Potential interview lead questions and probes are listed below:

#### **Lead Questions**

**Introduction and Lead Question One:** Please share your academic experiences with me and share how your study abroad experience played a role in your academic career.

**Lead Question Two:** What were your career goals when you graduated from graduate school and what are your career goals now?

**Lead Question Three:** What influences do you think have impacted your career goals?

**Lead Question Four:** How did your study abroad experience impact your personal aspirations and career aspirations?

**Probes**

Could you help me understand what you meant when you said

\_\_\_\_\_?

If I understood you correctly, you said \_\_\_\_\_?

Will you expand on your discussion of \_\_\_\_\_ a little bit more?

## Appendix J

### Example of Initial Coding

#### Katniss

I was getting my master of education degree in college student personnel and I was looking for an opportunity to participate in during the summer between my first and second year of graduate school. It was common for students in my program to have some sort of internship or study abroad experience during the summer between their first and second years. I received an email through a listserv that I was a member of about this two-week opportunity to study abroad in England and visit different institutions of higher education and learn more about the educational system in the United Kingdom (UK). After reading through the details, I decided to apply. I was most interested in the program because I was able to take a course as part of the program and transfer it back to my home university. The credits transferred back into my graduate degree as an elective course. Although cost was a factor in my ability to participate on the program, I was able to apply for some financial aid to help cover the cost of the experience. After I was accepted into the program, I corresponded with the faculty leaders and other students virtually before we all departed for the UK.

was seeking an experience

receiving academic credit was important in her decision to apply

Learning in a global context  
cross-cultural comparison

There are three major takeaways that I gained from this experience. One of the biggest takeaways was obviously learning about the educational system in another country. We traveled to different types and sizes of institutions and were able to talk to faculty, staff, and students who attended the schools, I have always had an interest in global experiences, so this was really enlightening for me. Another takeaway was simply being in country and having a global experience. Being in another country and experiencing the culture, shopping, and the food was pretty amazing. It was my second time in the UK so some things were familiar.

cultural experience

However, it was a really interesting time in that they (the UK) had just had a terrorist attack on the subway system in London. This attack was internationally recognized, so it was a bit

Health & Safety; world events; terrorism

Innocence;  
~~innocence~~

nerve wracking to travel to a place when something pretty scary had just happened. I mean, in retrospect, I think it was even a bigger deal than I realized at the time. One of the hotels that we stayed at had a nearby subway station still blocked off due to the incident. I found myself thinking through what had happened and trying to understand what was going on. Now when I think back, that's a pretty vivid picture in my mind.

diversity of participants;  
learning from each other.  
interpersonal relationships

The third takeaway from the experience that was really impactful on me were the interactions with faculty from another institution, as well as my fellow students. My roommate was from New York City and she worked at a university there in career services, which is the field that I am now in. I also got to interact with students from all across the United States who worked in a variety of areas within higher education. We spent quite a bit of time together and that was a really good experience.

In my current position, I work with students from other countries on a daily basis. Typically, the students that I work with are from Asian countries, more specifically China. I don't know if I have directly connected my study abroad experience to my work. However, knowing what it is like to go to a different place that you do not know or understand may help my work with international students. You know, when I studied abroad we were still making telephone calls on a real telephone, standing outside at a phone booth. I had to learn how to adapt to a new country and culture, even though I knew the language there. The students that I work with today are speaking a second language. So I definitely think that if I had not had that study abroad experience, I wouldn't always understand the types of challenges that our students face.

relating to others;  
empathy for others;



Having had this study abroad experience also encourages me to encourage college students to study abroad. This is a conversation that I have quite a bit. I work in the field of career services and students are always trying to figure out what they're going to do to build their experience. I would say that it is very life changing to go abroad, especially for an extended period of time. Being immersed in the culture, learning from the experience, and interacting with students from other institutions makes the experience what it is.

current use of experience

In my current position, I work in a business college and we partner closely with the office of global business. We have opportunities for short-term study abroad programs within our college. Having studied abroad on a two-week program, I have experience with short-term programs and I understand how even a two-week experience can be very life changing. I spend a lot of time talking to students about paying attention to the experience they are having when they're abroad. We conduct a pre-departure orientation and talk to students about how studying abroad relates to careers. We do this because we also talk to a lot of employers and ask them if they prefer students who have had an international experience. Their feedback tends to be that it depends on what the students gets out of the experience and how they communicate that to their future employers. So we talk to students a lot about not just saying, oh, the food was good or it was amazing, but literally stating what they got out of the experience. Whether it be on a resume or in an interview, we encourage students to reflect on their experience and to think about how it relates to their career and what they want to do in life. This is a pretty cool part of my job.

I also had an opportunity to go to Hong Kong for three weeks with a group of students to serve as a resident advisor. The group was made up of undergraduate business students and MBA students. While in Hong Kong, the students did a consulting project for a company

in-country. While I was there, I lived in the residence with the students and was there in case they needed anything. I also coordinated weekly meetings for the project leaders to communicate with our university to provide updates and issues. I participated in a lot of sightseeing and weekend experiences with the students. I don't think without having studied abroad that I would have been comfortable being a resource for the students. Europe is a place that it a little bit easier to feel comfortable in, and I really couldn't wrap my head around what it would be like to travel to Hong Kong. But, I'm confident and comfortable enough in going abroad that I was able to go and try something new. Having traveled to Hong Kong has also helped me connect with and better understand the Asian students that I work with.

Increased self-confidence to try new things & to travel new & different places.

## Appendix K

### Example of Coding for Specific Themes

Self-confidence

#### Charlotte

*The summer between my first and second year of graduate school, I had the opportunity to study abroad on a faculty-led program that occurred every year for higher education and student affairs students to tour an area of the United Kingdom (UK). The year that I went, we traveled to Scotland for ten days – two weeks and we had the opportunity to tour three different parts of the country. The duration of the trip was just right for me, even though it was a lot to process in a short period of time. It was kind of like a “gateway” experience that made me wish that I had studied abroad as an undergraduate student, even though I do not know if I would have been ready at the time.*

*We started out in Glasgow and visited two schools there, then we traveled to St. Andrews where we visited St. Andrew’s University, and then we traveled to Edinburgh and visited two or three schools. During the trip, we had the opportunity to really see what student services were offered at each school, talk to colleagues at those schools, and compare the similarities and differences between colleges and universities in the United States (US) and in Scotland. Although in both countries we all have a desire to help students, the Scottish universities were not as far along as we were when it came to the level support and the variety of services that we provide to students. In Scotland, they advise students, they provide services to ensure that the students are comfortable and safe, and they offer campus programming, but it’s just not quite as in depth as what we do here. Also, the academic experiences of students are different. Their majors and classes differ from what we offer in the US.*

*My study abroad experience was a great learning opportunity. I learned a lot from this experience and it helped me realized that I could take on challenges and experience a new place. In addition, I had the chance to interact with other American students who were involved in student affairs programs throughout the US. There were three participants from my school and everyone else were from different schools, which was a*

very good thing because we had the chance to learn from each other, as well. I still stay in touch with a lot of the people that were on the trip.

My study abroad experience was very comfortable compared to some student's experiences because we were traveling as a group and I was with faculty from my home school. It wasn't like I was going to Scotland on my own and having to navigate through everything without a support system, but that was my first time in a foreign country and things were different. The experience made me realize that I could be across an ocean, hours and miles away from family and be ok with the experience. It also made me realize that you may not know your way around the area, but you'll figure out where you need to go and what you need to do. I was open to trying new foods and experiencing a new culture, which made me realize that just because you're in another country, people aren't necessarily going to be extremely different from you. There are going to be things that you can relate to with others. My study abroad experience definitely made me excited about the possibility to travel abroad again. "I haven't had the opportunity to do it yet, but you know, I'm not as apprehensive about that should the opportunity arise."

After the study abroad experience I returned to my final year of graduate school so that I could finish up my master's degree in student affairs and higher education. When we got back, I was able to process the experience with the other participants from my school and we were able to talk to our faculty about questions and issues on an as needed basis. However, I think that a formal re-entry process would have been nice as opposed to simply having to sort through it on our own.

Upon graduation, I accepted a position to work in career services at a large institution in another state. The study abroad experience probably influenced me not to be so apprehensive about moving to a new city and taking a job away from home. After my program ended, I traveled to London for fun. While in London I was so amazed by all of the diversity. London was the most diverse place I'd ever been. During this experience I

*had no choice but to get to know people who were different from me, whether they were in my travel group or were Scottish or English people that I met along the way. So when I moved to a totally different state and lived in a much more diverse city from what I was used to I was more open to interacting with and learning about people who were different from me.*

*I have now moved back to South Carolina and I am working in career services. Within my current position, there is an indirect relationship with study abroad. As I work with students from a career guidance perspective, I try to help them realize the benefits that their studying abroad had on them and encourage them to include the experience in their resumes and interviews. I also work with students on articulating their study abroad experience. This will help make them more marketable candidates for whatever they decide to do, whether it is applying to graduate school, full-time jobs, fellowships or anything else that they want to do after graduation. I want to make sure that they realize the benefit that studying abroad can have on their college experience and on their future. Just last week I had something happen that made me think back to my study abroad experience and how they do things in the UK. "I met with a student who is interested in going to Cambridge or Oxford for graduate school and even though I did not have the opportunity to go to Cambridge or any of the institutions in England, you know, when we were looking at their website together trying to navigate through that, it was definitely – it's different trying to figure out the best way to advise her." Although that was a little challenging, I was not caught so off guard because I had gotten a glimpse of how things are different while I was studying abroad. Even though we had to take a different approach, it was helpful knowing that there are still people in the UK who want to help you. I also reminisce about the experience through pop culture. Whether the publicity of William and Kate or watching golf tournaments, it is fun to think back to my experience and to realize that I have been there and seen the places first hand.*

## **Appendix L**

### **Example of Researcher's Field Notes**

Carmen 10/31

- lack of opportunity during undergrad
- noticed re-entry within others
- 2-week program = golden ticket
- Multiple universities/cities
- when I refer to "that" now —  
survey / data leading to funding
- the internationalization of student affairs

After the Interview

Now she is in charge of the grad survey and is focusing increasing the response rate. Now they are re-assessing the options and they realize that eventually the gov't funding will be tied to this and she brings up the UK.

The students in the UK are using the career centers and the centers & therefore now which & the centers receive

assessment & the funding & philosophy

managing ambition in the US  
vs. encouraging the \$ track  
in the UK.

Teacher (wanted to be forever)

↳ math teacher (major)

↳ English teacher (for experience,  
7 years) but wanted to be a guidance  
counselor)

— was simultaneously a national  
sorority consultant on the  
weekends. really enjoyed working  
with the college students

Found C.U. when giving the HS  
Juniors a college road trip

was career EA and now is in  
the career center again

As an older grad student she was  
"older & wiser" with and took  
advantage of more opportunities  
and the experience



Orientation leader

Sorority pres

dance team

University 101 co-instructor

during her  
undergrad

Found it challenging to work with so many classmates straight out of college. bc they did not have the practical knowledge to apply within the classroom.

"Whether by happenstance or not" she finds her career services position is a combination of her mentoring HS students and working with college students.

## Appendix M

### Carman's Journal - July 19

July 19 - XXX

I think everyone enjoyed our time at XXX today. We were warmly welcomed immediately and received a lot of great information. The setting allowed for discussion, which was excellent. It allowed for a true sharing of information and experiences and rich dialogue. There was just a vibe of enthusiasm in the room that was energizing.

We had a great tour of the union led by the sabbatical president. They really capitalize on the space they have for relaxing areas, society/committee rooms, and offices. The campus was busy with people, so it was easy to picture how everything looks during terms.

## Appendix N

### Carman's Journal - July 12

July 12 - XXX

The day began with a delicious breakfast at the hotel. XXX, the director of career services met us at our hotel, XXX to escort us to his office. He provided some extra insight to XXX college and a few other locations. I was really excited to see their career center and hear how they serve their students. Before arriving XXX and I spoke about how he was helping XXX find a position and navigate the job market.

When we arrived colored posters and a television with information greeted us - very similar to XXX. A helpful face was waiting at their "front desk" to help direct students. As we walked down the hall to go downstairs there were several posters, free handouts, etc... I loved the downstairs area.

There was a small open area with even more resources - there were more occupational area specific. In addition to the small meeting room where we met, there was an additional resource room. In addition to paper resources they had four computer stations/terminals for students to use.

With all this room along with their library upstairs they definitely have more print resources than we have. During the presentation

XXX mentioned how even with the internet their students still want print resources. (My school only want the guide in print - everything else they want online. All of their offices were upstairs and separate (like our: XXX). They really used their vertical space well and designed it with intentionality.

Operationally, students can drop-in or make appointments,

Before a student makes an appointment, he/she must call or stop by, so the front desk can diagnose what the student's needs are and how much time is needed. This procedure is also similar to my school. XXX did a great job explaining the organizational structure and finances. The most significant difference between our career counselors and theirs was the amount of real world experience each has before becoming a counselor. They also have special areas where we work with all students. We do connect students with different counselors who have more knowledge in an area but still work with all students. There is also a strong connection between them and the employers. Where they will speak on behalf of a student,

and we don't intervene in the application process, the relationship seems to be very similar.

Internships don't carry the same weight as in the states.

I liked how XXX described the overall student journey. It was a great way to frame their start to finish services. They definitely seem to share the same passion for helping students to enter the world of work.

It was interesting the student perspective of XXX and the application process. Their terms and weeks have an interesting structure. It is nice that despite the hard work they can still "enjoy" college with activities. It would be neat to see an actual week and shadow a student to see how the classes go and how the faculty

challenge them - no hiding in the back row and slipping through the cracks.

The counseling services were interesting as well. It's good to know stigmas attached to receiving services is everyone - they are just different. They appear to try and provide a wide variety of sessions for groups. I was surprised about the unlimited number of sessions being available. While it isn't always obvious - like us - there are definitely levels of counselors for the students like with their DOS.

One thing I definitely want to check on when I get back is to see if my office has archived positions available to students. I think this is a great feature. I was pleased we have XXX like they have

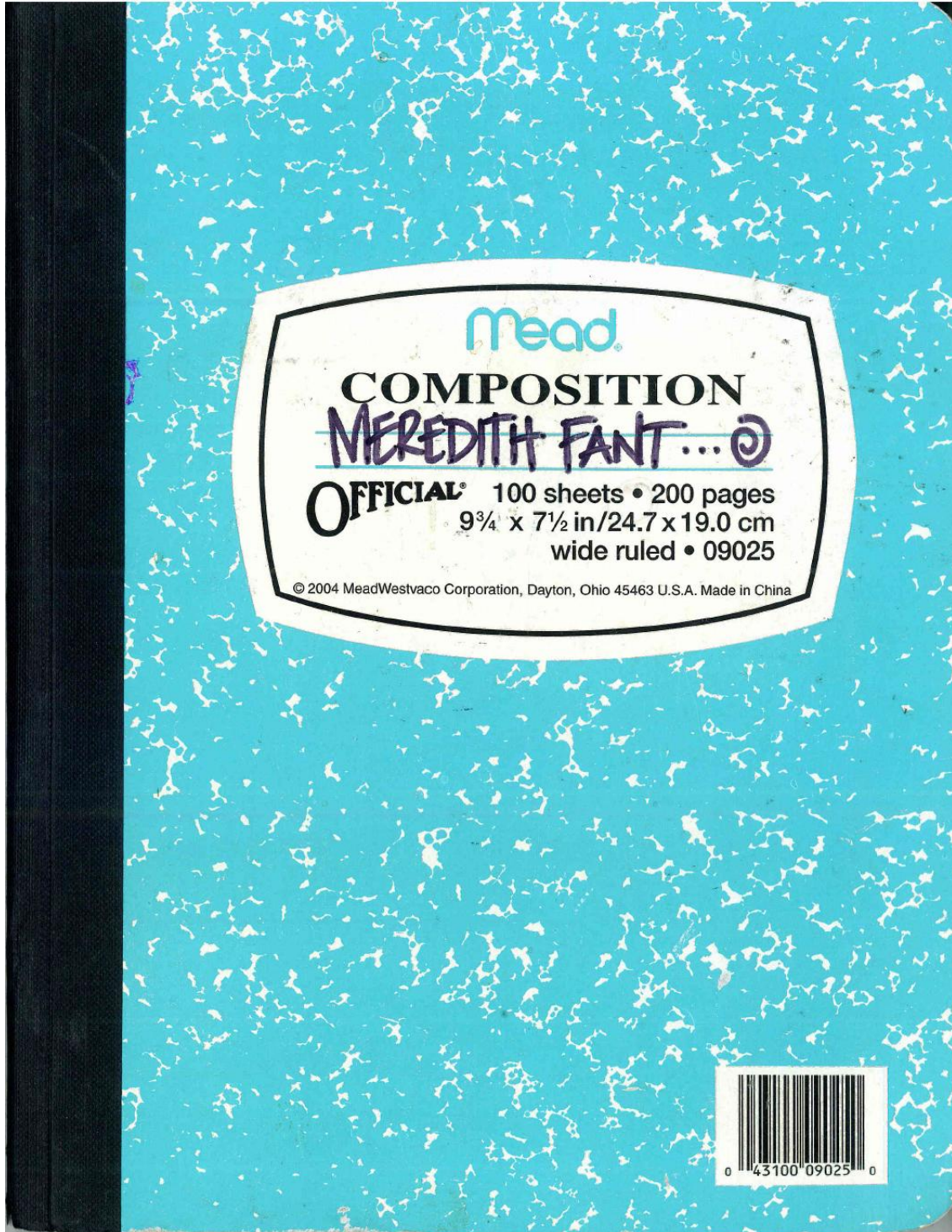
XX I do want to improve  
our online videos/recordings.  
I look forward to reviewing  
their website to see where we  
could improve.

• • • • •



Appendix O

Researcher's Journal



## Overall thoughts

July 28<sup>th</sup>

I've gotten a lot more out of this trip than I expected. Not that I had low expectations, but it really has been a very unique experience.

In our final group discussion, I realized how much I had learned about myself, about others, and about HE.

I have to admit that I was quite nervous about leaving to come on the trip. 10 yrs ago on June 28<sup>th</sup> my parents left w/ my sister to go to Emory Hospital in ATL. That was the last time I saw <sup>my</sup> sister. Ever since that point I've had a difficult time saying goodbye to people, b/c I'm afraid that one of us will not return. Since <sup>my</sup> sister's death I've also been

very careful to not get overly attached to individuals— my way of "saving" myself pain and heartache in the long run. My parents are an obvious exception and somehow <sup>my</sup> Boyfriend made his way into my heart, as well. I really believe that <sup>my</sup> sister found him for me. He is a lot like her in many ways and has filled a void in my heart that had long been empty

Having said all of this, knowing that I was saying g'bye to the 3 of them and to my babies <sup>my</sup> cats I was really frightened that I wouldn't be able to concentrate on the trip for thinking about them. But I have pushed myself to move on and to use this opportunity to the best of my ability. In many ways I have learned how

strong I am, as an individual. But at the same time how much I need the love and support I get at home!

Once again in my life this trip has tested my ability to let down my guard and get to know others & to learn to be more patient with people. I have surprised myself @ my ability to take things with a grain of salt and not let them get in my way of having a good time. I tend to get stuck in my own world where I ~~can~~ do things I enjoy and am surrounded by people who want to make me happy (yes, I am spoiled.) But I worked hard during this trip to not always think about myself and to include others in my thoughts. I also tried hard to be very flexible during the trip.

I also learned a lot about higher education and realized how grateful I am to have had the opportunities I have had in life. The outlets of expression and education opportunities I had @ <sup>my</sup> school were really wonderful. I now have a greater awareness that not all students get these sorts of chances. I enjoyed seeing the long running traditions of xxx and 'xxx', but also seeing up and coming universities like xxx and xxx. Although the trip was a whole lot packed into a short amount of time, I truly believe it was a once in a lifetime experience to see so much and to learn so much.

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