

RCT &amp; STUDY ABROAD

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# Relational Cultural Theory: A Guiding Framework for Study-Abroad Experiences

Janeé Avent Harris, Syntia Santos Dietz, Loni Crumb

- Faculty-led study-abroad programs promote cultural competence and professional and personal development for students. However, students from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups do not participate in these experiences at the same rate as students from majority cultures. Counselor educators must seek ways to recruit diverse populations to promote equity in and access to international education experiences. Relational cultural theory provides a guiding framework for counselor educators to diversify study-abroad programs while attending to cultural and power dynamics. Implications for counselor educators and recommendations for future research are also included.

**Keywords:** Relational cultural theory, study abroad, counselor education

The number of U.S. college and university students participating in study-abroad educational experiences has increased. In the 2016–2017 academic year, 300,000 U.S. students participated in a study-abroad experience, a 2.3% increase over previous years (Baer, Bhandari, Andrejko, & Mason, 2018). Of these students, 88% were undergraduates and 12% were graduate students. While great strides have been made to increase participation in study-abroad programs, they remain relatively homogenous in racial/ethnic composition. During the 2016–2017 academic year, 67% percent of the students who studied abroad were White women (Baer et al., 2018). The num-

ber of U.S. students participating in study-abroad programs who identified as part of a racial/ethnic underrepresented group has modestly increased over the past 10 years, growing from 17% in the 2005–2006 academic year to 29% in the 2016–2017 academic year (Baer et al., 2018). Of these students, 10% identified as Hispanic or Latino(a); 8.2% as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander; 6.1% as Black or African American; 4.3% as multiracial; and 0.4% as American Indian or Alaskan Native (Baer et al., 2018). Accordingly, the typical demographics of study-abroad students are White women from economically advantaged backgrounds (Baer et al., 2018).

Janeé Avent Harris, East Carolina University; Syntia Santos Dietz, Antioch University – New England; Loni Crumb, East Carolina University

The impact of study-abroad experiences on students' personal and professional dispositions is extensive. Students who study abroad have increased self-confidence, and they are less rigid and more comfortable and adaptive in diverse work environments (How more study-abroad programmes, 2015). For counseling students, Barden and Cashwell (2014) found that global immersion experiences enhanced the understanding of different cultures among counselors-in-training and deepened their empathic abilities. While these characteristics are beneficial and transformative for students from all disciplines, they are particularly relative and vital for counselor education students. Professional counseling and counselor educational organizations such as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), the American Counseling Association (ACA), the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), and the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) recognize the importance of international experiences and the need to understand helping relationships from a global perspective. Specifically, initiatives through NBCC-International (NBCC-I) and the International Registry of Counselor Education Programs (IRCEP) seek to expand the reach of counseling, understand mental health in global contexts, and provide students and counselors with opportunities to learn in different countries.

While there is a growing body of conceptual and empirical work related to studying abroad, there remains a need to provide specific direction as these programs expand and become more popular (Smith, Benschhoff, & Gonzalez, 2018). In addition, while much of the literature focuses on how international programs impact the cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills of student participants, little attention has been given to how faculty intentionally integrate social justice and equity in the planning and recruitment stages of these experiences (Sweeney, 2013). Considering culture in all aspects of the program may help diversify the participant pool and increase

access to the resulting professional and personal benefits. This article provides an overview of the existing literature about study-abroad programs, identifies an area that has been underexplored, and introduces the use of relational cultural theory (RCT) as an innovative approach to respond to this gap in the literature.

### Study Abroad in Higher Education

Study abroad is defined as “academic study in another country for credit toward a U.S. degree” (Brockington, Hoffa, & Martin, 2005, p. 5). Education abroad supports learning by providing students the opportunity to immerse themselves in different cultures in ways that cannot be done in their home cultures alone. This type of experience helps students respond to the challenges of a globalized world, improves their personal and professional development, and increases their capacity to be empathetic global citizens (Brockington et al., 2005; Santos Figueroa, 2014). Study abroad has expanded to encompass a variety of activities with the purpose of preparing students for life and careers in a globalized, interconnected world. Study-abroad experiences represent opportunities to expand knowledge and experience beyond intellectual and geographical borders (Brockington et al., 2005; Santos, 2014; Santos Figueroa, 2014). To develop an effective program, educators need to not only consider a global perspective but also connect that knowledge to their local cultures. That connection, the acknowledgement of both cultures involved, and the reality of both contexts are indispensable for the translation of knowledge into practical competencies for visitors and locals (Brockington et al., 2005; Santos, 2014; Santos Figueroa, 2014).

Regulatory and best practices exist to provide accountability to maintain scholastic rigor in study-abroad experiences. The Forum of Education Abroad (FEA) established the *Standards of Good Practice* to provide accountability, guide development, and offer a means of assessment for study-abroad education (FEA, 2015). All programs should have an established mission and clearly articulated goals, and

student learning and development objectives should reflect the identified mission and goals. An academic framework should guide the program, ensuring supervision, evaluation, and clear academic policies. The organization should maintain fair, ethical recruitment and selection processes and offer adequate student preparation, advising, and ongoing student support. Student codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures should be made available so students know behavioral expectations and consequences when these are violated. Policies and procedures that govern the programs should be well-defined and consistently implemented with regular reviews to assess effectiveness. Organizational and program resources should be maintained so programs are adequately funded and staffed. The health, safety, and security of students traveling abroad are a priority; therefore, proper orientation and training should be provided to students and faculty to minimize risks. Overall, programs should be ethical, and staff should be trained in ethical and culturally relevant practices such as building relationships with students and host partners (FEA, 2015). Although the *Standards of Good Practice* are fundamental in planning a successful study-abroad experience, student learning outcomes and cultural competence development also depend greatly on faculty leaders' expertise and involvement, students' willingness and readiness to learn, and meaningful program activities. Activities that promote critical reflection are essential throughout the process, including daily journals and on-site group reflections (Dietz & Baker, 2019; Jaoko, 2010; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2011).

### Study Abroad in Counselor Education

Counselor education programs have the responsibility to prepare future counselors to be culturally competent professionals who can effectively serve diverse clients nationally and internationally (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). Counseling students should be challenged to think globally, expand their knowledge beyond geographical borders, and become world-minded citizens and professionals (Leung,

2003; Merryfield, Lo, Po, & Kasai, 2008). Barden, Sherrell, and Matthews (2017) replicated Holcomb-McCoy and Myers' study (1999) to understand professional counselors' cultural competence. One of the major findings from Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) was that counselors were more knowledgeable about their cultures than those different than their own. Furthermore, Barden et al. (2017) found that professional counselors, including a representative sample of ACA members, were more culturally competent in their own self-awareness than knowledgeable about other cultures. Barden et al. (2017) suggested that counselor educators be more intentional in promoting cultural knowledge rather than focusing solely on increasing awareness. This is important as the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MCSJCC) identify awareness, knowledge, skills, and action as domains of cultural competence (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). Well-designed study-abroad programs support different aspects of cultural competence development, including increased self-awareness, reduced bias, and a better understanding of diverse communities (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; Dietz et al., 2017; Dietz & Baker, 2019; Jaoko, 2010; Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997). Specifically, counseling students who have increased global literacy through study-abroad programs can transfer knowledge that promotes holistic wellness across diverse contexts (Smith-Augustine & Wagner, 2012).

Study-abroad programs are beneficial to counselor education programs because cultural skills should be integrated across the curriculum in all courses (CACREP, 2016; Crumb, Haskins, & Brown, 2019). For instance, group counseling skills are enhanced when counseling students have greater cultural awareness and competence (CACREP, 2016; Crumb et al., 2019). Moreover, Ng, Choudhuri, Noonan, and Ceballos (2012) suggested that counseling programs offer courses that focus on mental health from an international perspective and include study-abroad

experiences for students. Although students may not provide direct service to clients who represent the countries visited, the depth of relational and cultural awareness received from study-abroad experiences benefits all clients (Dietz et al., 2017; Smith-Augustine & Wagner, 2012). Students may become more aware of commonalities in the universal human experience, which may deepen their empathy and understanding for clients in their home countries. For instance, understanding poverty abroad will aid in students' understanding of economically disadvantaged communities in which they live and work. Study-abroad experiences have also prompted students to connect global discrimination and social justice issues to local social and cultural issues. Bringing a social justice lens to the study-abroad experience promotes impactful discussions regarding privilege, historically marginalized populations, and advocacy (Dietz & Baker, 2019). Developing cultural competence and global awareness and building growth-fostering relationships should be at the forefront of the helping professions to better serve diverse populations.

Despite the relevance and benefits of these experiences for counselor education students, there remains a lack of access to participation in international education programs. Reports have noted that underrepresented and historically marginalized students (e.g., students of color, economically disadvantaged students) face unique challenges that inhibit their international education experiences, such as financial concerns; lack of encouragement and support in decisions to go abroad from family and faculty members; and less knowledge of what academic, personal, and future career gains can be attained by going abroad (Sweeney, 2013). Study-abroad programs, such as the one presented by Smith-Augustine, Hall, Dowden, and Tobin (2014), highlight the level of interest among underrepresented counselor education students. However, it is incumbent upon counselor educators to construct study-abroad programs that consider these challenges and to reconsider current recruitment methods to attract a diverse group of students.

The FEA specifically references the student recruitment process in their best practices and standards and challenges faculty to ensure these practices are equitable. Counselor educators must be intentional in recruiting students from diverse backgrounds and life experiences to participate in these experiences. Moreover, counselor educators must be aware of the nuances that may exist in recruiting students from underrepresented groups. Thus, relational cultural theory (RCT) provides a guiding framework that can be applied from program conception to implementation; with this, counselor educators can work to increase awareness and organize strategies that are culturally sensitive to the nuanced experiences of underrepresented and historically marginalized students.

### **Relational Cultural Theory: A Guiding Framework for Study-Abroad Experiences**

RCT is built on the foundational belief that healthy relationships and genuine connections are not only inherent to the human experience but also imperative to our growth and development. As such, the theory serves as a guiding framework for several counseling and counselor education contexts, including teaching pedagogy, student advising, supervision, and clinical practice (Purgason, Avent, Cashwell, Jordan, & Reese, 2016). More specifically, scholars have applied RCT to their work with underrepresented and historically marginalized populations (e.g., Crumb & Haskins, 2017; Kress, Haiyasoso, Zoldan, Headley, & Trepal, 2018; Singh & Moss, 2016) as a means to understand and empower these groups.

The RCT principals of authenticity, mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and relational awareness are especially applicable in planning and carrying out a study-abroad experience grounded in a commitment to equity and access. For the purposes of this paper, the definitions of RCT concepts are gleaned from *Relational-Cultural Therapy* (Jordan, 2018) in which the concepts are operationalized as follows:

- *Authenticity* is understood as the capacity to bring real experiences, feelings,



and thoughts into relationships while being sensitive to and aware of the possible impact of one's actions on others.

- *Mutual empathy* is the openness to being affected by and affecting another person.
- *Mutual empowerment* suggests that both people in any growth-fostering relationship experience more aliveness, clarity, and a greater sense of possibility and potential agency.
- *Relational awareness* is a being attentive to one's own experience, the other person and the relationship and developing clarity regarding the movement of the relationship.

The focus on relationships in RCT counters many of the traditional Western concepts of autonomy and individuality (Jordan, 2018). As increased empathy has been found to be a benefit of study-abroad programs, RCT offers counselor educators an approach that purposefully focuses on empathy during the developmental stages of the experience. At the core of every study-abroad program should be an intentional focus on growth-fostering relationships. Growth-fostering relationships encompass the growth of oneself in tandem with other people that enhances the capacity for connectedness, which results in mutual respect and development (Jordan, 2018; Miller & Stiver, 1997). This sense of reciprocal growth should exist among all the relationships in the process: faculty to faculty, faculty to host country partners, faculty to students, faculty to community stakeholders, students to community stakeholders, students to host country partners, and student to student. RCT also provides an approach to navigate the ways in which power may influence these dynamics and, in turn, the study-abroad experience.

### Case Illustration

The following section illustrates a study-

abroad program grounded in the fundamental concepts of RCT (e.g., authenticity, the building of growth-fostering relationships, mutual empathy, mutual empowerment). The authors describe the planning and recruitment phases of the study-abroad program with examples of how they incorporated RCT components into each phase.

### Positionality of the Counselor Educators

The three authors are all women of color who are pre-tenured counselor educators. The first and third authors served as the faculty directors of the study-abroad program, and the second author served as a consultant and assisted in implementation. They all identify as counselor-advocate-scholars (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018) and take actions to help eradicate the social structures and processes that reproduce economic and mental health disparities in vulnerable communities (ACA, 2014). Each author strives to incorporate social justice advocacy into her research, teaching, supervision, and counseling practices (Ratts et al., 2016). The authors also embrace the RCT concept of fluid expertise in which they honor each other's multiple identities and areas of knowledge, which fosters mutual growth and respect (Jordan, 2018).

### University/Counseling Program Demographics

The study-abroad program was hosted in a master's-level counselor education program at a public, four-year, predominantly White university located in the rural southeastern region of the United States. The counselor education program had approximately 70 students enrolled (White: 48, Black: 17, Hispanic: three, two or more races: two; males: five, females: 65). Students who participated in the study-abroad program included seven African American women, two European-American woman, and one biracial woman (Hispanic and European-American).

### Planning

Many logistical components should be considered when proposing a study-abroad program. These

considerations include choosing a host country, calculating a budget, contracting with educational tour companies, creating a curriculum to accompany the study-abroad experience, marketing, recruiting, and securing financial resources (Mills, Deviney, & Ball, 2010; Smith, McAuliffe, & Rippard, 2014). Above all, establishing mutually empowering, growth-fostering personal and professional relationships is fundamental to planning an inclusive, cost-efficient study-abroad program that leads to transformative learning in counselor education programs (Dietz & Baker, 2019; Smith et al., 2014).

**Faculty–faculty relations.** The first step in the planning process is to establish growth-fostering relationships among faculty program directors. Cartwright, Avent-Harris, Munsey, and Lloyd-Hazlett (2018) found that counselor education faculty from underrepresented groups face unique challenges in their respective programs at universities across the United States. Specifically, faculty of color report the need for supportive, authentic relationships with colleagues and students to enhance and sustain their professional endeavors (Cartwright et al., 2018). From an RCT perspective, authenticity is necessary for genuine engagement (Jordan, 2018). Moreover, counselor educators who are women of color must feel as if they can be wholly themselves without judgment or non-constructive critiques from others (Haskins et al., 2016; Shillingford, Trice-Black, & Butler, 2013).

Considering the importance of authenticity, the faculty directors initially met to discuss the need to host an international education experience for their students based on the observation that many of the students in their master's program had never traveled outside their regions of the state or out of the country. Furthermore, drawing upon research findings (Dietz & Baker, 2019; Smith-Augustine & Wagner, 2012), faculty directors believed international educational experiences would enhance the cultural competence of pre-service counselors. The faculty directors had never participated in or facilitated a study-abroad program. However, the second author, who had

previous experiences with study-abroad and international education, gave valuable insight throughout the process and shared her own experiences as a faculty of color. Smith-Augustine et al. (2014) noted that internal cultural immersion also benefits faculty members' multicultural competence. Hence, the faculty directors discussed the professional repercussions associated with hosting a study-abroad program, such as time away from research responsibilities and teaching duties to focus exclusively on planning an international education program and the potential for personal and professional development.

In addition, the faculty directors considered their roles as mothers and spouses and the additional personal strain study-abroad travel would place on their personal lives (e.g., support, work–life balance; Haskins et al., 2016). Accordingly, the faculty members reflected on the relational competence and relational capacities component of RCT (Miller & Stiver, 1997) and agreed to be vulnerable with each other during the planning process by discussing their anxieties related to launching the program. For example, they frequently discussed the fear of failure, disinterested students, perceptions of being incompetent by colleagues and students, and the risks of sacrificing time otherwise spent on research and teaching duties. The faculty directors also discussed varying relational images (i.e., past relationships that guide an individual's relational expectations; Crumb & Haskins, 2017; Jordan, 2018) and how they influenced their personal self-efficacy. The faculty directors identified and consulted with senior counselor educators within and outside their university, including the second author, about planning and implementing a study-abroad program.

**Faculty–host country partner relations.** The second step of the planning phase involved establishing growth-fostering relationships with individuals in the host country. As suggested by counseling researchers (Alexander et al., 2005; Barden & Cashwell, 2014), the faculty directors considered numerous factors when identifying a potential host country,

including the distance from their home university, the primary language spoken in the country, the presence of mental health and psychological services in the host country, and whether organizations such as the NBCC-I, ACA, and IRCEP had pre-established relationships with counseling associations in the host country. The faculty directors researched these factors and chose a host country that reflected the factors noted above. The faculty directors contacted universities in the host country with counseling-related programs and discussed the possibility of bringing a student group to the university to learn about mental health topics.

The faculty directors also identified a travel agency in the host country that could help arrange travel and establish connections with local schools, religious institutions, and community agencies that would buttress the learning experience. The travel agency provided contacts to the primary faculty director. The primary faculty director arranged video calls with representatives of the respective entities to begin building rapport and relational connections and to allow increased audio and visual engagement (Kvale, 2007). The faculty directors were in contact with representatives from the travel agency bi-weekly. In essence, it was important that the counselor educators intentionally created growth-fostering relationships with individuals in the host country to build connections that led to welcoming, authentic interactions (Dietz et al., 2017).

### Recruitment

One of the greatest challenges in study-abroad programs is the lack of cultural diversity among student participants (Goldoni, 2017; Sweeney, 2013). RCT provided a roadmap for responding to and navigating these challenges to encourage participation from students from diverse groups (e.g., ethnic/racial minorities, economically disadvantaged students; Dietz et al., 2017). Primarily, the presence of trust, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment are at the core of building students' interest in participating in study-

abroad programs directed by faculty members of color (Dietz et al., 2017; Lu, Reddick, Dean, & Pecero, 2015). Most of the students in the counselor education program had no out-of-country travel experience, and they believed participating in a study-abroad program posed insurmountable obstacles to their participation. Other students who expressed interest were apprehensive about joining due to the perceived high cost of international education programs and unfamiliarity with the logistics (e.g., passport applications, course credit requirements). Based on extant literature (Penn & Tanner, 2009; Perdue, 2018; Willis, 2015), the faculty directors anticipated these concerns and distributed marketing material at the new student program orientation, on social media sites, and via emails to students at the start of the academic year. The faculty directors also disseminated the marketing material bi-weekly via email to student listservs. In addition, the faculty held two virtual meetings to discuss the program with interested students.

**Faculty–student relations.** In accordance with RCT, the faculty met with students after classes to foster relational interactions (Jordan, 2000). The faculty directors intentionally approached each of these conversations with empathy, considering that students (primarily students of color) disclosed apprehension about participating, noting that they did not have the financial means and some lacked support for participating from family members. The RCT concept of *central relational paradox* may help faculty members understand this phenomenon. Central relational paradox represents the concept that individuals “alter themselves to fit in with the expectations and wishes of the other person, and in the process, the relationship itself loses authenticity and mutuality, becoming another source of disconnection (Jordan, 2018, p. 125). For example, students planning to study abroad may indicate to faculty and peers that they have the economic means to support their travel when in reality, they may lack the monetary means necessary to participate in the initial stages of travel, such as covering the cost of passport fees, and thus feel ashamed to

disclose this to faculty and miss orientation meetings. Considering the potential for central relational paradox, the faculty used judicious self-disclosure and shared with the students their past experiences of not participating in study-abroad programs due to their lack of familiarity and insufficient economic resources. The faculty directors were careful to validate each student's feelings and acknowledge their circumstances. Subsequently, the faculty directors distributed an email list of scholarships and fellowships supporting international educational travel. In addition, the faculty directors helped students complete applications for these supportive resources each week. Mutual empowerment (Jordan, 2018) was vital in this phase since the students also encouraged faculty to continue planning a successful study-abroad experience.

**Student–student relations.** Building a sense of community among interested students was important; therefore, the faculty formed an informal student interest group. The students organically began to support each other's aspirations to travel abroad. The faculty observed this mutual empowerment process among the students. Furthermore, students who were part of the faculty interest group formed their own social media group to converse about trip planning and exchange resources and strategies for securing financial aid. The students also shared their interest in the program with other counseling students, which helped bolster recruitment efforts.

Finally, the faculty directors deemed it important for the students to build familiarity with the host country. The faculty members distributed bi-weekly podcasts to the students about the history and culture of the host country as well as the travel experiences of students who had visited the country. Community and educational partners in the host country provided many of these podcasts and materials. Overall, the intentionality of grounding the study-abroad program in RCT principles helped build authentic, growth-fostering, mutually empowering relationships among the faculty directors, partners in the host country, and counselor education student participants.

## Discussion

Study-abroad programs continue to evolve to meet the educational needs of U.S. students as the need to understand diverse populations grows and the benefits of these programs manifest personally and professionally (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; IHE, 2018). While study-abroad programs are becoming more educationally rigorous, in many instances, they are still inaccessible to students from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations (Sweeney, 2013). Thus, RCT is proposed as a guiding framework for planning and implementing a culturally relevant program that includes students from diverse populations. The following section provides implications for counselor educators and recommendations for future research. These implications and recommendations also include challenges and limitations that faculty adhering to an RCT study-abroad approach may encounter.

### Implications for Counselor Educators

Counselor educators are uniquely positioned to be leaders in the effort to diversify study-abroad experiences; as such, they must be intentional in developing their own cultural competence to effectively lead a study-abroad program (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014). Counselor educators need to demonstrate knowledge of the cultures of the student participants and the host country (Barden et al., 2017; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2018). Although the MCSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) focus on client and counselor relationship dynamics, they are applicable in this context, and they provide a guide for faculty seeking to increase their cultural competence. Thus, counselor educators must be aware of the ways in which privilege and oppression impact the faculty–student dynamics (Ratts et al., 2016). As discussed in this article, RCT provides a guiding framework for identifying these factors and working effectively through them for a successful study-abroad experience.

Furthermore, counselor educators must learn about the cultural norms of their students and how



these norms may impact their experiences in the host country. For example, in the case study, the faculty needed to be aware of cultural norms of African American and Hispanic individuals (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014). It is important to note that while this manuscript focuses on recruiting underrepresented students, it does not exclude the participation of White students. RCT is an inclusive approach (Jordan, 2018; Purgason et al., 2016) that can be applied to students from majority and underrepresented groups. Counselor educators must also consider the impact of context on their experience. For instance, Smith-Augustine et al. (2014) presented a study-abroad program in which they took seven African American students on an international education experience. The counseling program was situated at a historically black college or university. While programs like these are promising, counselor educators who at PWIs may encounter nuanced challenges when trying to implement these recruitment strategies since they may have fewer students from historically underrepresented groups. They must also be prepared to encounter administrations that do not necessarily see the value in ensuring these experiences are diverse; thus, they may have to proceed without these direct supports and resources (Cartwright et al., 2018).

**Challenges and limitations.** The application of RCT in planning and recruiting study-abroad experiences holds great promise; however, it is important to acknowledge challenges and limitations that may exist. In general, graduate students comprise a small percentage (12%) of study-abroad participants (IHE, 2018). This is important to note since counselor education programs are primarily graduate-level programs. In addition, White women comprise 49% of students enrolled in CACREP-accredited master's and doctoral programs (CACREP, 2018). Therefore, because the focus of this article has been on diversifying student participation, it is important to acknowledge that counselor education faculty may already be working with a smaller participant pool.

It is important to note that in some instances,

faculty may encounter barriers in forming relationships with host countries. In fact, a faculty's interests in a host country may not be reciprocated. In these instances, RCT provides a framework for working through these disconnections while respecting the host country's disposition. However, it is important to ultimately respect the wishes of the host country if they are not interested in working with faculty members or specific countries. It is important to recognize that the host country or institution may have their own previous experiences and relational images of the potential visiting country or institution. As such, faculty members must allow time to develop rapport and establish good communication, and they must be genuine in expressing the program's intended purpose and goals. It is also important to discuss how this experience will benefit both countries and institutions and how the partnership may be sustained in the future. Another way to potentially mitigate these barriers is to utilize a local travel company from the host country. This practice helps establish connections, and the travel company acts as a partner in building relationships with potential country partners. Whenever possible, it is also important to identify faculty or staff with an established relationship or connection with the host country to get more information about their culture and initiate first connections. However, as mentioned earlier, the decision to establish the relationship must be mutual since RCT principles consider growth-fostering relationships as those in which both parties participate, develop, and grow together (Jordan, 2018).

Planning study-abroad programs requires a significant amount of time and effort. Programs that are well-designed and intentional and that aim to be impactful in student development and growth-fostering relationships are especially demanding, and they cannot be developed in isolation. These educational experiences require strong teamwork, validation, and support. The best practices outlined by the FEA require planning outside normal teaching and research duties (FEA, 2015). In addition, no common standards have been especially designed for counseling

study-abroad programs, although resources such as the FEA standards and empirical work by Ng et al. (2012) provide a foundation for counselor educators to develop competencies specific to counseling study-abroad programs. As part of their normal duties, faculty already manage research, teaching, and service responsibilities, which can sometimes be overwhelming (Cartwright et al., 2018; Wester, 2019). Thus, embarking on a study-abroad program, especially if it is as time-consuming and emotionally demanding as the one described in this article, may seem risky, and the benefits to faculty may not readily be seen. Administrators can help mitigate this by highlighting the workload associated with RCT study abroad in faculty reviews and in the promotion and tenure process.

Cartwright et al. (2018) highlighted the need for faculty from underrepresented identities to feel supported by colleagues and administrators. One way for this support to be seen tangibly is by intentionally involving faculty of color in study-abroad programs. However, it is important to be mindful of the responsibilities associated with carrying out a successful international educational experience. Thus, faculty with underrepresented and marginalized identities, who already carry additional emotional and service responsibilities, could benefit from practical support, such as teaching assistants and research resources (e.g., course buyout, internal funding). In addition, faculty must be intentional in identifying ways in which they may translate this experience into scholarship. For example, a faculty member may write conceptual and empirical manuscripts at various points during the process.

Although RCT provides a way to respond to power dynamics, the hierarchies and challenges that follow are often engrained in higher education systems (Cartwright et al., 2018). Moreover, attending to mutuality and reciprocity in the various relationships involved in planning and recruiting for study-abroad programs could add to the complexities in maintaining professional and ethical boundaries (Purgason et al., 2016). For instance, a faculty member who serves

as study-abroad program director may also be the instructor of record for another course the student is currently enrolled in, which may make it difficult for the participant to disclose information such as financial difficulties.

Although RCT provides a useful guiding framework, faculty members may want to consider integrating additional resources to navigate these processes. This is especially important when buy-in from the university is dismal. Some example of these could include the MCSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) and ACA Advocacy Competencies (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). These competencies provide faculty members additional resources for articulating the value of study-abroad experiences and the anticipated micro- and macro-level impact for individuals, universities, and communities. The advocacy competencies in particular provide faculty members guidance for systems-level change (Toporek et al., 2009).

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Program Planning**

Counselor education and supervision scholarship should inform the methods used to plan programming since faculty are tasked with utilizing culturally relevant and empirically supported practices (Wester, 2019). While there is emerging empirical support for RCT, there remains a need to expand this line of inquiry (Lenz, 2016), particularly as it relates to the application discussed in this article. Qualitative designs seem appropriate given the emerging nature of this topic, and they would allow an understanding of the experiences of faculty and students engaged in RCT-informed study-abroad programs (Wester, 2019). The various elements of the RCT study abroad present an opportunity to understand relational aspects of teaching and mentoring practices (Wester, 2019). Examples of qualitative studies may include phenomenological investigations into the experiences of faculty of color in planning and carrying out study-abroad programs, consensual qualitative research studies identifying best practices for RCT study abroad,

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and grounded theory studies that inform theories for recruiting and retaining diverse student populations in study-abroad programs. Smith-Augustine et al. (2014) recommended that faculty keep journals to document their emotional reactions throughout the study-abroad experience. Since RCT necessitates a significant amount of relational reflection, faculty could use these notes and reflections as data for qualitative studies. Opportunities for quantitative research also exist. Quantitative studies could involve measuring the cultural competence of underrepresented students in study-abroad programs (e.g., Barden et al., 2017; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999), with a specific focus on the knowledge aspect. These quantitative inquiries may require collaboration across study-abroad programs to achieve a sufficient number of participants.

### Conclusion

Study-abroad experiences are both instrumental in counseling students' cultural competence and beneficial to their overall personal and professional development. University faculty and administrators recognized a need to make these experiences more accessible to students from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations. RCT provides a guiding framework for counselor educators to recruit diverse students to participate in study-abroad programs.

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