

## **“Understanding the Motivations and Experiences of STEM Students in a Study Abroad Program”**

**Melanie Scheive**  
**STEM Education Research Institute**  
**Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**

From March 14<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of 2015, student members of the IUPUI chapter of Timmy Global Health traveled to Las Canas, Dominican Republic as part of a medical brigade team. Alongside doctors, nurses, dentists, and other medical personnel, participating students played an active, hands-on role in helping to provide primary care services to over 600 patients from the five impoverished communities surrounding Las Canas (Timmy Global Health, 2015).

Undergraduate students, many of whom are STEM students, decide to participate in these medical brigade trips for a variety of reasons. The exact motivations and experiences of STEM students participating in health science-related study abroad trips, however, are not adequately explored in current study abroad literature. This research seeks to determine how each participant’s experiences in Las Canas have impacted their perceptions of health science-related careers. The specific aims of this project are concerned with understanding the following: 1) the motivations that influence the decision-making process of STEM students choosing to study abroad; 2) the individual experiences during a health science-based study abroad trip that are instrumental in refining and solidifying STEM interest; and 3) the student-level and community outcomes (e.g. an increase of STEM interest and a positive effect on local health care recipients, respectively) produced by a medical brigade experience. A mixed methods research design — including observations, interviews, participant reflections, and pre-/post-program surveys — was utilized to address this project’s specific aims.