

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON
OMANI NATIONALS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**

A Dissertation-in-Practice
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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MAY 2022

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON OMANI
NATIONALS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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DEDICATION

For Ms. Back, my high school French teacher, who did not hesitate when a couple of
country kids asked to study abroad.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no sufficient way to fully acknowledge all those who supported me on this journey. First and foremost, I must thank my family. My mom relentlessly encouraged me to embark upon doctoral studies and was there every step of the way. My dad, sister, and niece provided much needed support and cheerleading even when it meant I could not be as present as we all would have liked.

If it were not for Ali, I would have never been introduced to the splendors of Oman. His incredible kindness and advocacy of the Sultanate was the precipitating factor for my first journey there. In his words, “there are many” people with whom I am overwhelmingly grateful to call my friends. I could write a whole other dissertation to take the space necessary to thoroughly thank each of them. Thank you for your listening ears, your reviewing eyes, your supportive words, and putting up with me yammering on about Oman, and now this dissertation, for all these years.

I must acknowledge Dr. Allen Miller for taking a leap of faith and allowing me to implement the Oman project and recognizing my scholarly abilities even when I did not know they existed. Thank you to Dr. Diana Garland for encouraging me to consider this program nearly 15 years ago when she brought me to Missouri. Dr. Kennedy Ongaga’s technical guidance and feedback to get this research right pushed me in taking the dissertation to the next level. Finally, Dr. Cynthia MacGregor’s advice and guidance can never be understated. Though she did not originally know she would be proverbially adopting me at the end of our coursework, she never treated me as a burden. In our first meeting, her first question to me was, “who are you?”. Her strategy to learn my motivations for this dissertation set a foundation for our advising relationship that I will

forever cherish and aspire to emulate. Her guidance has not only been kind and patient, but also consistent and when needed, tough. I am profoundly grateful, humbled, and honored to have worked under her supervision and advisement through this process and have no doubts that because of her, I have arrived at this point better equipped, more knowledgeable, and perhaps most importantly, proud, than I would have otherwise.

I cannot say enough about the Omani people, who I am beyond blessed to now call colleagues and friends for opening their country, their homes, and ultimately their hearts to me. I will forever be indebted to all of them and hope that in my future professional and scholar endeavors, I am able to not only repay them but make them proud.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge how my parents' own transformative experience of leaving the hollers of West Virginia and traveling as far as the Rocky Mountains lead to them never once question my decisions to go around the world. They explored well before I did, and their bravery and experiences precipitated their unwavering support of my own curiosities. Though I travel far and wide, West Virginia will always be, much like the participants expressed in this study, a part of me, and will also always inform my own sense of self-identity. I cannot separate myself from my home, even though I transformed well outside of its borders, and I do not want to.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and understand the long-term impacts on study abroad participants' concept of self-identity and to also examine transformative learning experiences in an international setting. Using a qualitative research design guided by a phenomenological approach and underpinned in Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, the researcher collected data from 16 Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman. Findings suggest that participants of study abroad persistently reflect on the experience for the rest of their lives and prefer diverse connections, personally and professionally. Further findings suggest that their concept of self-identity now straddles both their nationality and an American sensibility fused together in their lived experience. These experiences bolster meaning-making for participants through such activities as advocating, either actively or passively, for study abroad to others in their spheres of influence.

SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION-IN-PRACTICE

Introduction

Moona grew up in the sand dunes of the Empty Quarter, a vast desert on the Arabian Peninsula, traveling on camelback, and moving about the landscape from one dwelling to another, as was the nomad life of her family. When she turned 18, she and her father traveled to the capital city of Muscat, Oman to discuss options for her to study. It was on this trip that she learned about an opportunity to study in the United States, a country of which she had never previously heard. Imagine the experience of moving from the vast desert terrain to an urban downtown campus in the American South. Moona credits this experience as the impetus for embarking upon a career in public service to Oman and a life dedicated to coaching young Omani women who are seeking their own paths. Now she lives in a sprawling upscale neighborhood of Muscat, traveling these days by luxury car. Leaving home and traveling thousands of miles to study in another country can be a transformative experience for international students like Moona. The challenges that accompany such endeavors may be great, but they do not overshadow the benefits of the experience.

The benefits of studying abroad are plentiful, both in and outside the classroom. There are well documented outcomes leading to personal growth, development of cultural competence, language development, and employability (Altbach, 1991; Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Barker & Westwood, 1990; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Lieb, 2016; Singh, 2018; Wu et al., 2015). Supporting the personal, academic, and professional goals of international students is a university-wide responsibility, but campus departments specifically designed to manage those supports are challenged to maintain contemporary and innovative practices to meet the needs of this ever-changing

population. The focus is almost entirely on the experience that happens while the international students are at the host institution, but what happens when the student returns home?

To understand the long-term impact of study abroad more definitively, it is imperative to examine how international students apply and make meaning of the experience well beyond their time on campus. Transformative learning does not end with the event itself but requires an application of critical reflection (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2003). In their recent exploration of reflective response to study abroad, Barton and Ryan (2020) stated that “given international students are likely to have diverse cultural and social perspectives on learning, reflection may also be understood and enacted differently” (p. 2). The researcher believes that reflection evolves over time, and is reapplied to the sojourn’s life experiences, iteratively, and for years after the study abroad experience itself.

Universities and colleges in the United States have witnessed dramatic growth in international student enrollments since the Institution of International Education (IIE) started collecting census data in 1948 in a report called Open Doors. At that time 25,464 international students were enrolled on American campuses. As of the last report in 2020, nearly 1.1 million were in the country representing 5.5% of all students in colleges and universities in the United States. (Institute of International Education, 2020).

This growth in the second half of the 20th century is attributed to the post-World War II attention to higher education. During this time: “international educational exchange expanded, first and foremost in the United States” (Deardorff, 2012, p. 48) when:

views of the world in the U.S. higher education were transformed almost overnight by World War II. From a cultural colony the nation was changed, at least in its own eyes, into the metropolis; from the periphery it moved triumphantly to the center. (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991, as cited in Deardorff, 2012, pp. 49-50)

This growth helped drive the creation of international student advising departments and professional development practice designed to support those students (Brevis, 2007; Deardorff, 2012). Prior to this expansion of international students, many higher education practitioners “unattuned as they were to the idea of global education exchange . . . expressed no more than mild interest in accepting students from abroad” (Brevis & Lucas, 2007, p. 60).

There is little doubt that students will continue to travel internationally for their higher educational pursuits. Therefore, providing intentional programming aimed at learning and meaning-making of that experience is imperative for international students and education abroad practitioners, especially as the number of students studying abroad has increased.

Statement of the Problem

Krsmanovic’s (2021) recent literature review of empirical research on international student services surmised that this work would act in providing deeper and systematic insights into the prior research in this area . . . necessary for the work of higher education institutions, faculty, and student affairs professionals tasked with supporting this student population and aiming to enhance their cultural, social, and academic experiences. (p. 3)

While international student advising offices support the incoming sojourns, study abroad advising offices provide support to the outgoing sojourn. It is there that some groundwork has been laid to examine the long-term impacts of the international study experience; however, it has been largely studied through the lens of westerners traveling abroad for short-term programs. (Brown, 2009; Paige et al., 2009; Walters et al., 2017)

There is scant research about the concept of self and identity in the transformational experience of the international sojourn traveling in either direction, specifically lacking is literature discussing the impact of the experience in an international setting (outside of the U.S.) after students graduate. Brown (2009) and Paige, et al. (2009) both found that the international student experience does have long-term implications. There is still little known about how beneficiaries of study abroad continue to incorporate the impacts of their experience throughout their life. In a study examining Chinese and Vietnamese student experiences in Australia, Tran (2013) found that the experience of studying transnationally is a “springboard for the emergence of the newly constructed self” (p. 137). Documenting and analyzing the long-term impacts on the international student’s concept of self -identity will inform international education professionals who are challenged in “how to capture and support the learning processes that occur through international experiences” (Arthur et al., 2020, p. 2).

Providing support to international students aimed only at on-campus success meets a primary need but implementing further services that introduce skills which promote reflection and meaning-making will foster learning well beyond the on-campus experience. Barton and Ryan (2020) proposed that “in order to make and connect meanings in their specific learning contexts, international students can be explicitly

taught how to reflect” (p. 3). Giving international students the opportunity to consider how they might intentionally and actively make meaning of their experience, and to consider that possibility while they are still engaged in the action of studying abroad itself, creates opportunities for practitioners to educate and prepare them for navigating after they return home.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to glean an understanding of the long-term impacts on study abroad participants’ concept of self-identity and to also examine transformative learning experiences in an international setting. Data collected from 16 Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman will help further inform international education practitioners on the lasting impact of the study abroad experience after graduation.

A qualitative research study using a phenomenological approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) employing personal interviews and focus groups was implemented to garner description of the post-study abroad experience, while a reflective oral history interview was solicited to gather evolving concepts on self-identity considerations. Seidman (2019) stated that a phenomenological approach in interviewing is used to “enrich lived experience by mining its meaning” (p. 19). Through this approach, the research questions were addressed in an effort to discover “the essence or basic structure of” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227) the study abroad experience.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do Omani nationals who graduated from U.S. universities reflectively apply that experience in their daily lives?
2. In what ways do Omanis believe their international study experience influences their identity?
3. How do Omanis continue to make meaning of their study abroad experience?

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary international education literature agrees that international study stimulates transformation even when contextual variables exist (Arthur et al., 2020; Aydin, 2012; Brown, 2009; Nada et al., 2018; Perry et al., 2012; Walters et al., 2017). Brown (2009) found that the “international sojourn has the power to effect a growth in intercultural competence, as well as a shift in self-understanding, with long-term implications for personal and professional life” (p. 517). Brown also posited that time away from one’s culture and home create a challenge that when overcome, paves the way for transformation. Nada et al. (2018) noted that in a study where Portuguese students who studied abroad were prompted to engage in narrative reflection, traits of transformative learning were almost always evident in participant responses, even when not explicitly articulated.

Transformative Learning

Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) provided the theoretical framework for the study. Using a grounded theory approach to examine drastic increases in women enrolling in college in the 1970s, Mezirow developed ten

phases that lead to a transformative process (Mezirow, 1991). The first phase, a “disorienting dilemma” and the last phase, “a reintegration into one’s life” paralleled the bookending experiences of the initial culture shock and re-entry culture shock phases of a study abroad experience.

Mezirow’s (1991) initial theory of transformative learning posited that one’s experience and background shape their reflective lens and only through a catalyst (i.e., a disorienting dilemma) can meaning perspectives, habits, and frames of references be transformed. Though scholarly debate continues to expand from Mezirow’s original groundwork, its initial iteration serves as the foundational basis for this study.

The study also drew on Dewey’s (1933) definition of reflection and Illeris’ (2014) work connecting identity to transformative learning to explore three conceptual threads: reflective application, making meaning, and identity.

Reflective Application

As individuals continue to reflect on their study abroad event, they reimagine it in accord with their lived experiences. In doing so, reflection is applied to their current circumstances and the original experience takes on new meaning. According to Mezirow, (1991) “we imaginatively reconstruct an earlier meaning by the same process of projection, interpreting what we know in the new and unfamiliar situational context” (p. 29). Accordingly, reflective application of study abroad is a continually evolving activity that extends well beyond the initial experience.

Making Meaning

John Dewey’s (1933) seminal work on reflection informs Mezirow’s work on meaning-making. Reflection as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any

belief or supported form of knowledge in the light of ground that supports it and the further conclusion to which it ends” (p. 9) is the definition by which transformative learning through reflection occurs. Using this foundation, meaning-making of a study abroad experience occurs through what Mezirow (1991) calls “premise reflection--a fault-finding review of presuppositions from prior learning and their consequences” (p. 102). This reflection has the power to transform when previously determined assumptions become challenged.

Identity

Once someone has engaged in reflective inquiry and meaning-making, what is the consequence of transformation? Illeris (2014) writes “when transformative learning is defined in relation to identity, it becomes possible to establish a direct connection to the current conditions and frames of society that create both the growing need for and the conditions of the transforming processes” (p. 153). Thus, identity consideration is not simply attributed to a transformative event, but rather it is the intended outcome. When sojourners do the work of meaning-making, their concept of self and identity will be intrinsically examined and could be altered.

Design of the Study

The goal of this study was to determine the transformative outcomes of study abroad that lead to identity development. A qualitative study underpinned by a phenomenological approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was implemented to guide a case study using Omani nationals who studied abroad in the United States, graduated with a degree, and returned to their home country. Incorporating a phenomenological approach served to assist the researcher in her goal of examining

and describing the lived experiences (Seidman, 2019) of the participants in the study. Mertens (2020) explained that phenomenology aims to describe the experience “from the point of view of the participant” (p. 255). Therefore, this approach provided a foundation for the Omanis to “arrive at structural descriptions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227) of their study abroad experience.

Setting

Data collection occurred on-site to familiarize the researcher with the setting (Seidman, 2019). The researcher traveled to Muscat, the cosmopolitan capital of Oman to conduct the study. The city is also the largest populated area in the country and where most citizens find employment and establish their residence. Due to challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher also administered predetermined contingency plans such as utilizing Zoom to implement some data collection.

According to the CIA World Factbook (2021), the Sultanate of Oman is an absolute monarchy situated on the Arabian Peninsula with a population of approximately 3.7 million people. Arabic is the primary language spoken and “Omani citizens represent approximately 56.4% of the population and are overwhelmingly Muslim” (CIA, 2021). Oman is a youthful nation with nearly 45% of their population being between the ages of 25-45 years old (CIA, 2021).

Known for being one of the safest and friendliest countries in the world, Oman holds a “friendly attitude towards foreign residents” (Internations, 2021). The website for Expatriate Group describes Omani people as incredibly welcoming towards tourists in the country, with the notion that “traveling as a woman in Oman is easy and safe just as long as you respect the culture” (Expatriate Group, 2021).

The researcher consulted with trusted colleagues and personal connections in Oman to ensure consideration and respect for cultural norms and expectations. As such, the researcher identified and selected meeting locations which prioritized cultural comfort of the participants. The researcher identifies as a woman so all meetings with men were held in this public space. Conversely, participants who were women appreciated private meeting spaces. As such, in doing so, the researcher procured space in a co-working, shared meeting place in a local mall which allowed for one-on-one interviews in booths. These booths supported dual purposes: they were constructed of glass so respect for cultural appropriateness for mixed gender meetings was adhered to and they were fully enclosed to also provide privacy. The researcher also procured a larger meeting room at the co-working space to implement the focus group for men.

The researcher offered various times and days for interviews and focus groups so participants could select the best option for their schedules. There were no options for meeting on Fridays because this is both the first day of the weekend and considered a day for family and religious obligations in Oman.

The study occurred in winter 2022 (late January and early February). The researcher deliberately chose this time of the year for two reasons. First, it is the most temperate climate during the year in Oman and consequently locals are more apt to attend non-requisite activities. Second, there are no religious or national holidays that occurred during that time.

Covid-19 Implications

Due to on-going complications resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher conducted some interviews using Zoom video conferencing software. At the

time of the study, the number of positive Covid cases in Oman were peaking so in some cases, participants requested virtual interviews as opposed to in-person options.

Participants

Sixteen Omani citizens of different ages and academic backgrounds, who earned degrees at various universities and colleges in the United States, were recruited as “people who know the most about the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). Participants (see Figure 1) who graduated within the last five years through those who graduated 20 or more years ago were recruited to aim for maximum variation (Seidman, 2019) in the sample. Gender of the participants was an ever-present note of concern in this study because the culture of men and women in social settings is relevant among Omani participants. Krueger and Casey (2016) stated that sometimes it is “unwise to mix genders” (p. 81). This was applicable for a research study in Oman where unrelated men and women remain largely separated in social settings.

Krueger and Casey (2016) wrote that one of the most useful ways to recruit participants for a study is to ask for nominations from those within the researcher’s networks. The researcher recruited study participants from existing personal and professional networks and from the Ministry of Higher Education as well as the Omani Cultural Mission in Washington, D.C. Ultimately, the most fruitful form of recruitment came from LinkedIn, a social media website that is the premier online site used by Omanis for professional networking.

Figure 1

Demographic Information of Participants in the Study

Interviews	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	F	1997	Undergraduate	Graphic Design
	M	1998	Undergraduate	Computer Science
	M	2008	Graduate	Petroleum Engineering
	F	2014	Graduate	Mass Communication
	F	2015	Undergraduate	Finance/International Business
	M	2017	Undergraduate	Communication
	F	2018	Undergraduate	Chemical Engineering/Mathematics
Male Focus Group	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	M	2005	Undergraduate	Information Sciences
	M	2010	Undergraduate	Business
	M	2014	Undergraduate	Civil & Environmental Engineering
	M	2019	Undergraduate	Business
Female Focus Group	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	F	2003	Undergraduate	Nursing
	F	2012	Graduate	Computer Information Systems
	F	2017	Graduate	Brand Management
	F	2017	Undergraduate	Software Engineering
Oral History Interview	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	M	2012	Doctoral	Organizational Communication

Note. This figure shows the breakdown of participants in each data collection by gender, graduation date, and major.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Three data collection procedures informed this research. Seidman (2019) stated that maximum variation sampling should be used to “allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading” (p. 58). Therefore, purposeful sampling (Seidman, 2019) was used to recruit a variety of participants for three semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2019). Secondly, two focus groups were implemented to understand what Omanis who studied abroad think about their experience (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Finally, a one-part and in-depth personal narrative interview (Mertens, 2020) was implemented utilizing oral history storytelling.

Mertens (2020) recommended six to 10 participants for phenomenological study. Ultimately, this purposeful sample (Seidman, 2019) was constructed of four participants in two different focus groups separated by gender. The sample for the interviews was constructed of seven participants consisting of four women and three men. One participant, a man, was recruited for the oral history interview. The total sample size was 16 participants.

Interviews

The first data collection method was seven semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using this format allowed the researcher to pivot and remain flexible during the interview as the conversation ebbed and flowed.

The researcher endeavored to approach the interviews using phenomenological framing to guide participants in deriving the essence and meaning of their study abroad experiences. Seidman (2019), outlined four themes that exist within a phenomenological interviewing strategy:

1. Focusing on the lived experience of participants.
2. Seeing understanding of the participants' point of view.
3. Gleaning the lived experience of the participants.
4. Underpinning the participants' derived meaning.

Accordingly, Seidman's (2019) suggestion of three interviews was used to allow the opportunities for "both the interviewer and the participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning" (p. 21).

The first interview (see Appendix A) for each participant was conducted on

Zoom before the researcher arrived in Oman. Therefore, the dissemination of informed consent forms (see Appendix B) occurred before the researcher arrived in Oman. All in-country interviews (see Appendices C and D) occurred in public places to ensure participants “feel comfortable and secure” (p. 55). The researcher used public co-working space to support use of neutral locations for the study.

Focus Groups

The second data collection method used was single category focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that “a focus group is an interview on a topic with a group of people who have a knowledge of the topic” (p. 114). Prior to meeting, participants were provided the notification of informed consent (see Appendix E). Two focus groups with four participants each (see Appendix F) were administered in both the public coworking meeting space and via Zoom. Each focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes. To continue supporting respect for local cultural expectations (Krueger & Casey, 2015) focus groups were separated by gender. Since the focus groups served as a unified analytical element (Mertens, 2020) each focus group was made up of four participants to allow for sufficient speaking opportunities for each member of the group. The smaller size is being used to “gain understanding of peoples’ experiences” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 82).

The researcher was challenged in finding an agreed upon time for the women's focus group to meet while she was in Oman. Upon departing, the researcher communicated with the participants of the women's focus group that it would occur electronically, via Zoom, soon after her return to the United States.

However, identifying a time where the four participants could all meet simultaneously proved unsuccessful. Consequently, four individual, one-hour interviews were held with each participant to satisfy the data culled from the women's focus group.

Oral History Interview

The final data collection method was a one-part, in-depth personal narrative oral history interview (Mertens, 2020). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that narrative “has become a popular source of data in qualitative research” (p. 34). The oral history interviewee was asked to simply recall their time abroad and narrate however he chose to do so. This process occurs between the researcher and the participants, but data is largely produced by the participant speaking about their experience (Mertens, 2020). An Omani that participated in neither the interviews nor the focus groups was recruited to meet with the researcher using Zoom software after her time in Oman. The participant was asked to narrate their experience of study abroad (see Appendix G). This aimed to “use stories as data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 34).

Data analysis

Using Mertens (2020) three step process, the researcher implemented an inductive analysis process (Seidman, 2019) as soon as possible after each interview and focus groups concluded. The three steps outlined by Mertens (2020) are:

1. Prepare the data.
2. Explore the data.
3. Reduce the data.

Prepare the Data

Seidman (2019) stated “to work with material that interviewing generates, researchers first have to make it accessible by organizing it” (p. 121). Prior to the first interviews, the researcher established a Microsoft OneDrive account through the University of Missouri-Columbia technology services department to create a secure and anonymous filing system to submit and store the data. An excel spreadsheet of anonymized names of the participants was created to facilitate organization during the process and serve as a repository of participants’ demographics.

All interviews and focus groups were recorded using the Otter.ai transcription application because recordings ensure “everything said is preserved for analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 131). This application was reported to the University of Missouri-Columbia technology department through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. The researcher read through each auto-generated transcription to “correct errors and fill in blanks” (p. 132) and get familiar with the data to support building an “intimate relationship with the data and to ensure accuracy” (Mertens, 2020, p. 460).

Next, the researcher read each transcript again, line numbering (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) each line for organization and easy reference. Conceptual coding of trends and patterns found in multiple uses of similar vocabulary, language that represents themes related to making meaning, critical reflection, and identity negotiation was given priority in analysis. Using NVIVO, a qualitative analysis software, the researcher began the open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) process by identifying and marking initial themes as they occurred in the transcript, by both typing notes in the margins and highlighting passages for future coding.

Explore the Data

The second step in the analysis process was exploring the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that “making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (p. 202). During this second step of analysis, the researcher began seeking and identifying similar themes and patterns to find opportunities to reduce the data and construct data categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Pre-categorization or axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of thematic elements that cut across all conceptual threads was identified and placed in the repository spreadsheet in the OneDrive. Adherence to the prioritization of the three examined themes continued throughout the entire process to “develop an analytics report that grows out of the purpose of the study” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 147). The researcher conducted coding, marginal notes, and highlighting electronically in the transcripts stored in the OneDrive within NVIVO. This served two purposes. It supported easy access for the researcher regardless of where she was or which computer she used, and it also reduced the need for physical data storage protocols.

Reduce the Data

The final stage in Mertens' (2020) process is to reduce the data and formalize categories which “capture and synthesize the main themes present in the data” (p. 464). The researcher reviewed the newly created and established thematic categories as she started deriving meaning and application from the data. The researcher also identified and recorded concepts that emerged from the data which “identify what themes cut across the questions” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 155).

An additional layer of analysis for the focus group and oral history interview data was implemented. Krueger & Casey (2015) recommend making notes during the focus groups that speak to the environment during the data collection. This differs from Seidman's (2019) advice to separate the interview data collection from analysis. The researcher incorporated Krueger and Casey's (2015) suggestion during the focus groups. The researcher recorded voice notes on Otter.ai to quickly document field notes which were later typed in the data repository.

The three-part interview transcripts were analyzed using Mertens' (2020) three step process, but the researcher also incorporated an additional step to facilitate further analysis of focus group and oral history interview data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed that analyzing narrative reflections utilizes summaries from the language within the data. The researcher endeavored to identify and sequence the events discussed by participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to support this guidance.

A systematic approach to analysis was implemented for all gathered data. Substantial planning and implementation occurred well before in-country research, including the dissemination of informed consent forms. Debriefing, organizing, and coding typically commenced immediately after data collection while the researcher was still in Oman. Consistency of analysis was a goal across all points of data collection (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Quality of Research Support

Credibility

In qualitative research, the goal of internal validity, or understanding how closely the research "matches reality" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 242) is known as

credibility. To satisfy credibility, Mertens (2020) stated that “prolonged and persistent engagement” (p. 279) should be the goal of the researcher. The researcher remained in Oman for two weeks but drew upon her own experience and history in the country, as well as pre-and post-study analysis to “avoid premature closure” (p. 280).

Another method to ensure credibility is called triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2020). Triangulation is the process by which data is confirmed by seeking consistency from multiple sources (Mertens, 2020). The researcher aimed for triangulation supported through purposeful sampling and multiple data sources. The use of these techniques is a “powerful strategy for increasing the credibility or internal validity” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245) of the research study. Additionally, respondent validation and member checks were implemented after all three interviews and the focus groups to eliminate potential misinterpretations (Mertens, 2020).

Transferability

Another goal in qualitative research is replicability of research that enables the readers to “make judgments based on similarities and differences when comparing the research situation to their own” (Mertens, 2020, p. 283). To support transferability, maximum variation among participants was sought, specifically regarding age, degree obtained, degree level, type of higher education institution, and as much as possible, cultural background to allow “for the possibility of greater range of applicants by readers or consumers of the research” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257).

The researcher endeavored to use rich, thick description (Mertens, 2020) of the participants' responses especially when discussing participants' background, setting,

and responses to assist the audience to “understand the complexity of the research setting and participants” (Mertens, 2020, p. 282).

Limitations

There were limitations present in this study: it was a single country sample, the researcher’s role as a doctoral student was constraining, and there were challenges presented because it was an international setting. The study also occurred during the Covid-19 global pandemic which provided unique challenges regarding face-to-face meeting with participants. As such, the interviewer utilized Zoom video meeting technology when necessary.

IRB Compliance

Before distributing informed consent to participants, the researcher completed human-subjects training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) (see Appendix H). Then the researcher obtained University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix I) prior to implementing this study. Part of this process required the researcher to gain permission from an organized body in Oman which allows for research studies to occur in the country. Upon recommendation from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. (see Appendix J), she received sponsorship from Sultan Qaboos University (see Appendix K) in Muscat which supported approval from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation in Oman.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher is a Caucasian, single woman with a professional background in international education. Personal experiences studying and living abroad provide

the foundation of her constructivist worldview. As the first of her family and personal network to study abroad, she is aware that her credence towards transformative experiences abroad was present during the study. Growing up in rural Appalachia, in an almost entirely homogeneous community, she endeavored to understand what others with similar backgrounds experience because of study abroad. Though she does have substantial professional and personal connections in Oman, she remained an outgroup within the local society. The researcher's professional, personal, and intellectual admiration, and curiosity towards the country of Oman ran the risk of providing an overly positive narrative of the state of the nation. Lastly, as a seasoned international education practitioner, her role as a member leader in her professional community brought with her an existing belief in and support of the intended impact of study abroad.

Given the researcher's direct experience with study abroad and international education, it is imperative that she sought avenues for addressing and setting aside her own bias. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest exploring her own "experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices" (p. 27). The researcher engaged in this process, writing down and documenting feelings that result in this process to "temporarily set aside" (p. 27) that bias. This process is known as "bracketing" (p. 27).

Significance and Summary of the Study

As international student advisors examine their work in a context that moves beyond on-campus activity, attention must be given to the meaning that is made by international students about their abroad experience (Brown, 2009; Tran, 2013; Walters,

2017). This study will move the conversation beyond immigration compliance and cultural adjustment as the only components of providing support services to international students. Tran (2013) argued “for the need to move beyond the discourse that problematizes international students’ learning, to recognizing and reconstructing international students as having the potential to transform their learning as well as their lives” (p. 138).

International education practitioners will understand the value of incorporating services that also support the development of critical reflection skills as these will better prepare international students for their concept of identity development post-study abroad. “Considering reflection for and with international students has the potential for their domestic counterparts, higher education staff and others to further understand what international students may face during their time as a student overseas (Barton & Ryan, 2020, p. 12).

Finally, this study will also contribute to the literature on both international education and study abroad, an area which is currently lacking substantive findings on the meaning-making that occurs after participants complete their program and return home. While understanding the implications of the on-campus experience that occurs during the study abroad program is of vital importance, further documenting the residual effects of that experience carries further weight in justifying the significant impact of transnational education.

SECTION TWO:

PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Leadership does not begin and end with the office doors. In the case of international student practitioners, this means that leadership is not limited to the campus borders. Nor is it necessarily confined to the activity of simply receiving international students on campus. Given the legal implications of a managing immigration compliance framework, the practice of supporting and serving international students requires regional, national, and international networking and collaboration. Moreover, international student support offices must maintain a firm grasp on best practices for supporting their students as the student population evolves. In alignment with Northouse's (2019) assertion that "leadership occurs in groups" (p. 6), international educators know that without engagement with their counterparts across the United States and beyond, their effectiveness is greatly inhibited.

History of NAFSA: The Association of International Educators

After the end of World War II, Jenkins (1978) explained an environment where restrictive borders acting as barriers were being re-examined in a manner unlike ever before. In his words:

The constraints of time and travel were soon to be redefined. The concept of space and the limits of one world would be given a new dimension. Among the emerging repercussions of the stress and strain of the times was the beginning of the greatest transnational movement of students and scholars in the history of education. (p. 13)

With the increase of international students arriving in the United States,

college and university personnel began to seek collaborative and connected opportunities to engage with others who were experiencing similar trends. The first conference on international student exchange was held in 1948 at the University of Michigan wherein Dessoiff (2008) described:

Building on efforts initiated as far back as 1903 to create a national organization on behalf of foreign students, in response to concerns during the war about foreign students stranded in the United States, academic institutions, government agencies, and private organizations combined at the Michigan conference to form the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA). (p. 20)

The following year, in 1949, the Peoples' Republic of China was established and NAFSA found itself the premier advocate for Chinese students stranded in the United States. This advocacy called for the need to organize structurally; thus, NAFSA began forming committees to address the challenges international students faced (Dessoiff, 2008). "The academic institutions, government agencies, and private organizations that combined to form NAFSA knew that meeting the needs of diverse students required special knowledge and competencies" (NAFSA, 2021, para. 1).

With the implementation of the Fulbright Program in 1946 and the Marshall Plan in 1948, international education became a formalized activity that spread well beyond the campuses that hosted international students. NAFSA positioned itself to be the leading organized body of professionals to help further the cause of international study and exchange when it started receiving federal grants in 1951 which supported international education activity (Dessoiff, 2008).

The field began to expand its scope and in 1964, the association changed its name to the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA, 2021). This change was implemented to better reflect growing collaboration with community partner programs that routinely assisted the foreign students on campus.

According to NAFSA's public website, the organization:

experienced a breakthrough in its federal government relationships in 1976 when John Richardson, then assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, changed the State Department's interpretation of funding for NAFSA.

This gave the association the opportunity to not only fund activities that advanced foreign student issues, but also to advance study abroad issues. (NAFSA, 2021, para. 3)

With renewed attention to China in the 1970s during the Nixon administration, NAFSA played a key role in the expansion of educational exchange between the two countries when it "began publishing a series of books and papers relating to U.S.-China educational exchanges" (Dessoiff, 2008, p. 28). Later in the decade, NAFSA once again found itself advocating for stranded international students in the United States with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Prior to this event, Iranians had made up one of the largest populations of international students studying in the U.S.

The 1990s ushered in a new time of growth for NAFSA as the Cold War ended and students from Eastern Europe began to study in the United States in higher numbers than ever before. Equally, U.S.-based students increasingly began to study abroad and NAFSA found the need to once again rethink and reimagine its mission. "In May 1990, the membership formally renamed the organization NAFSA: Association of International

Educators. The acronym was retained to reflect NAFSA's proud past and broad name recognition” (NAFSA, 2021, para. 8).

At the direction of the Board of Directors, NAFSA developed a public policy profile in 1998 during the Clinton Administration which proved instrumental in advocating for international students and study abroad in the coming years (Johnson, 2008). NAFSA’s initial public policy agenda resulted in the first-ever U.S. presidential executive memo on international education in 2000 (NAFSA, 2007).

The early 2000s initially saw continued growth in international education, but with the attacks of September 11, 2001, national security became an increasingly important part of the international student practitioner’s portfolio. The newly created Department of Homeland Security established the Student and Exchange Visitor Program which in turn developed the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) as a mechanism to provide tools for reporting and tracking international student immigration compliance in the U.S.

NAFSA’s newly established public policy endeavors worked to remind the American people of the benefits of international students by “reminding the country of what it had once known but the trauma of 9/11 had made it forget: that international students are good for this country—that rather than being part of the problem of terrorism, international students are part of the solution” (Johnson, 2008, p.8).

The early 2000s also saw increased attention to international study when:

Congress also provided the first significant increase in Title VI and Fulbright-Hays funding since the 1960s. Later in the decade, Congress took further steps to expand U.S. participation in study abroad programs, including the creation of a

17-member Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. (NAFSA, 2021, para. 9)

In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the globe, NAFSA was once again called upon to help provide strategic guidance and direction as international educators grappled with day-to-day decisions while assisting international students in the United States as well as U.S.-based students studying abroad. It created and maintained a repository of up-to-date resources for practitioners managing international and study abroad students during the pandemic (NAFSA, 2021).

Today, NAFSA continues to be the foremost professional organization for international education practitioners ranging from admissions and enrollment managers to senior international officers at colleges and universities around the world. Each year, they host an annual conference that serves as the “preeminent unifying destination for the diverse voices of international education to gather each year” (NAFSA, 2021, para. 10). Beyond the annual conference, the association provides leadership opportunities through volunteer positions at the state, regional, and national level to distribute and implement critical resources, engage in advocacy, and provide ongoing training in the ever-evolving field.

Organization of NAFSA

There is no one simple way to define the structure of organizations (Perrow, 2009). As NAFSA has evolved, often in direct response to world events that directly impact the international education field, their organizational efforts have continued to realign accordingly. In 1978, Jenkins described NAFSA as made up of a “combination of a core of long-term professionals--which includes many long-term, full-time directors of

international offices, foreign student advisors, and teachers of English as a second language.” (p. 14). Today, NAFSA is composed of a formal board of governors, an executive leadership team, full-time staff, and a corps of member volunteer leaders (NAFSA, 2021). As the organization has evolved, so too has the need for its structure to be redeveloped and redefined. A supervisory approach of top-down management does not support the intricacy of the work so the structure must adapt when “work becomes more complex or the environment gets more turbulent, structure must also develop more multifaceted and lateral forms of communication and coordination” (Bolman and Deal, 2017, p. 111).

To contextualize the practitioner setting, the following will discuss the structural frame by which NAFSA is organized both professionally and through member-volunteer leadership. Next, NAFSA will be examined through the symbolic frame which further fosters volunteer stewardship to the organization. Finally, the researcher will provide an analysis of the implications of this proposed research for NAFSA.

The Structural Frame

Bolman and Deal (2017) stated that, “conscious attention to lines of authority, communication, responsibilities and relationships can make a huge difference in group performance” (p. 111). Therefore, the organization of NAFSA greatly impacts the success of not only its internal staff, but also the large volunteer leadership community from practitioners in the field. Strategically, “NAFSA organizes its goals around the organization’s three strategic focus areas: influencing public policy, creating and disseminating knowledge, and maintaining a strong organization” (NAFSA, 2021, para. 2).

Member Volunteers

Membership in NAFSA is held by a variety of international education practitioners and adjacent partners. To become a member, one can purchase membership in a variety of categories: new member, individual member, retired professional, student member, etc. (NAFSA, 2021). The individual membership is available to international educators who are affiliated with an academic university or international organization. Typically, international educators' affiliated institutions support membership by providing funding for this type of membership. NAFSA's membership website outlines adjusted price points for those who are not supported by their institution, or in the case of the new member, a lower price point as an introductory opportunity.

As a member, NAFSAs have access to a variety of resources which connects them “to a global network of colleagues and peers and offers a wealth of resources to help you find solutions to any challenges you are facing” (NAFSA, 2021, para. 1). These include the annual conference, annual regional conferences, professional reference resources, practical resources which members can access for the purpose of both networking and professional development.

Members are also eligible to apply for volunteer leadership opportunities which are designed to further the organizational and strategic direction of NAFSA. Volunteering also provides leadership development activity for the members. Members who volunteer in leadership positions are known as member-leaders at NAFSA because they carry out the work plans that speak to the strategic direction and emphasis of the organization (NAFSA, 2021).

Application of Mintzberg's Organizational Model

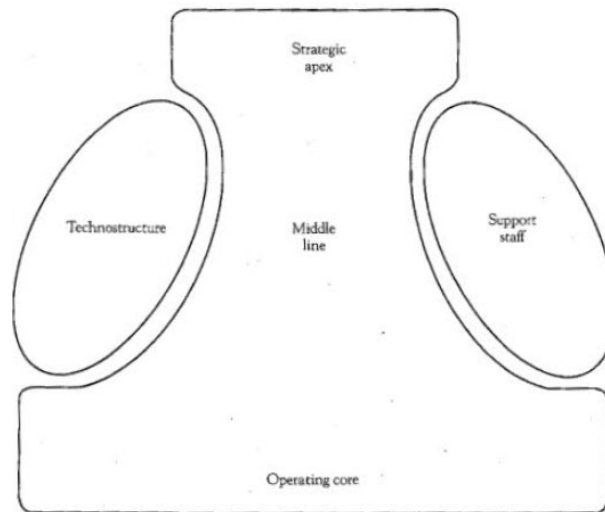
To provide an organizational analysis for this practitioner's setting, NAFSA's structural frame will be discussed by using Mintzberg's (1979) organization model of functional clusters, specifically the five basic parts of organizations as shown in Figure 2. In Mintzberg's (1979) model, the organization is made up of an operating core tasked with manufacturing the product of the organization and an administrative unit tasked with coordination of the operating core both of which are presided over by a governing strategic apex; "Mintzberg's model clusters various functions into groupings and shows their relative size and influence in response to different strategies and external challenges" (Bolman and Deal, 2017, p. 77). Given the complexity under which NAFSA now operates with a strategic board, salaried staff, and member volunteers, this model most directly aligns with its structural organization.

In Mintzberg's (1979) model, the "core of operators" (p. 219) make up the base and foundation of the organization while two orbs--the technostructure and the support staff--float on either side of the organization. In the middle and at the top of the model, a middle line and strategic apex facilitate communication from the operating core.

The NAFSA board of directors strategically leads the organization by guiding "the association through its strategic plan that sets out goals and objectives over a three-year horizon" (NAFSA, 2021). Thus, the board of directors is the strategic apex of the organization which "is charged with ensuring that the organization serves its mission in an effective way" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 223).

Figure 2

Mintzberg's Model: Five Basic Parts of an Organization



Note. Figure from Mintzberg, H. (1979) The five basic parts of the organization. In J.M. Shafritz, J.S. Ott, & Y.S. Jang (Eds). *Classics of Organization Theory* (6th ed., p.200). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

The NAFSA middle line is represented by the senior staff consisting of NAFSA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and several senior professional level positions. Their responsibilities rely heavily on providing expertise and oversight through leadership mechanisms which inform the strategic direction of the organization. Within this middle line is also senior advisory staff that is responsible for directing partnerships and development providing what Mintzberg (1979) described as “personal contact” (p. 225) between the strategic apex and operating core.

A group of staff at NAFSA known as the “Leadership and Professional Development Services” (NAFSA, 2021) team make up the support staff orb from Mintzberg's model. This group largely collaborates with and facilitates the work of the large contingent of volunteer member-leaders typically composed of college and

university international education practitioners who represent the operating core of the organization.

NAFSA's human resources management, finance and administration, legal coordination, public policy coordination, and membership management personnel work to support the needs of the organization and represent the technostructure orb of the model. These positions serve as the "analysts concerned with adaptation, with changing the organization to meet environmental change, and those concerned with control, with stabilizing and standardizing patterns of activity in the organization" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 227).

Lastly, the member-leaders made up of volunteers from the membership represent the operating core. As such, they are producing the output of the organization (Mintzberg, 1979). Through a series coordinating committees, work from the operating core is created, developed, and implemented (NAFSA, 2021). Ultimately, members provide the foundation for the model of organization and serve as the "heart of every organization, the part that produces the essential outputs that keep it alive" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 223).

The Symbolic Frame

While NAFSA plays a critical and practical role in the advancement of international education, the organization plays an equally significant role as the symbolic head of the practitioner's professional realm. For example, international student educators rely heavily on NAFSA's direct communication and advocacy with government agencies to help provide guidance and instructions on implementing immigration compliance regulation. However, this particular component of the international student professional role does not typically motivate practitioners. Rather, most professionals in international

education have themselves benefited from an international experience that spurred their curiosity about the field. The outcomes of that experience often are so impactful that practitioners wish to engage in the field to further values and ideology related to the international exchange.

NAFSA as an Agent of Peace

NAFSA's existence represents a collective body of individuals working collaboratively towards a common value, shared by individuals who mostly have a common experience. In many cases, international educators believe in the principle that "international education advances learning and scholarship; builds understanding and respect among different peoples; and enhances constructive leadership in the global community" (NAFSA, 2021). The ultimate goal of such a noble endeavor is that it is believed to foster opportunities for peace.

The mutual understanding and motivating drive of this value are the very essence of international educators. This value underpins what NAFSA stands for and means to its volunteer leaders. The idea that members are creating avenues towards peace is what "helps people find meaning and feel special about what they do" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 243). In NAFSA, international education practitioners willingly and repeatedly help the structural organization because they believe the goal of fostering peaceful exchange to be a worthy cause.

NAFSA further supports this mission in their Diversity and Inclusion Statement wherein it "affirms its commitment to diversity and inclusion as principles that enrich not only individuals but also organizations and society as a whole" (NAFSA, 2021). This stands as a shared vision of NAFSA members "illuminating new possibilities within the

realm of myths and values” (Bolman and Deal, 2017, p. 244). NAFSA’s value as a peace broker remains one of the motivating drives for its members.

NAFSA as a Culture

Being a member of NAFSA comes with an identity and organizational culture. Specialized language exists within the organization. One can often hear international student advisors refer to the “alphabet soup” of advising which describes the multiple initials used to shorten immigration regulations. For example, Optional Practical Training, an employment benefit for international students, is often only called “OPT” among NAFSA members. Further members do not refer to themselves as “members” but rather “NAFSAns.” This specialized language allows NAFSAns to “communicate easily, with minimal misunderstanding” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 270).

The annual conference is a ritual often referred to as “summer camp” for international educators. It is the week each year that NAFSAns gather as not only an opportunity for professional development but also as an “expressive occasion” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 273). During the annual conference, tokens of expression are created through the conference name badge. Not only is the badge used for displaying a NAFSAn’s name, but it is also an opportunity to retrieve stickers, ribbons, and pins throughout the conference to express one’s geographic region or professional interests.

NAFSAns organize into smaller sub-groups called Knowledge Communities (KCs) based on professional interests like student advising, teaching English as a second language, and admissions and recruitment. There are also subgroups called Member Interest Groups (MIGs) for interests specifically for the individual NAFSAn like religious affiliation, athletic endeavors, or personal hobbies.

Additionally, NAFSAns form personal bonds with one another building friendships that transcend beyond the professional element of the association. This attention to the whole person within NAFSA is what creates its symbolic structure for the member-leaders who “serve a deeper and more durable function if they recognize that team building at its heart is a spiritual undertaking” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p.277).

NAFSA represents much more than simply a professional organization for its members. With its dedication to fostering the ideals of peaceful dialogue and scholarship through international exchange, and its community building among the members, NAFSA remains a conduit and convener for international educators from around the world.

Implications of Proposed Research

NAFSA is the premier source for international educator’s professional development. International student practitioners use NAFSA to learn about best practices in international student and study abroad programming. It is also a primary source for innovative and contemporary opportunities in international education support. As such, it is the researcher ’s goal that the results of this study will contribute to the existing professional development resources and scholarship designed to equip international student practitioners with the necessary skills and tools to further promote international student success. As the front line of support and service to international students during their study abroad experience, international student practitioners need to know what type of learning to support and foster.

Barton and Ryan (2020) note that international student advisors in higher education need to implement educational programs that teach reflective practice which

international students can use in “making sense of oneself” (p. 12). Through the proposed study, the researcher aims to provide evidence that the meaning made from study abroad can be supported while the student is still engaged on campus, and that international educators can also facilitate programming that promotes learning activities which foster transformative learning.

Conclusion

NAFSA serves a practical function wherein it provides an avenue for connection to government agencies and global networking for its member-leaders. As the premier international education organization with nearly 70 years of storied success, its intervention on behalf of its member-leaders to help further promote peaceful exchange of learning and ideas remains ever relevant to the thousands of NAFSAns who identify as driving agents of this shared value.

SECTION THREE:

SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

Background for Scholarly Context

Colleges and universities across the globe have seen a tremendous increase in international student enrollment over the last few decades. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that in the last 30 years, “the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship, that is foreign students, has risen significantly, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 3.5 million in 2016, a more than fivefold increase” (OECD, 2016).

In 1948, the Institute of International Education (IIE) started collecting census data on international student enrollments in the United States and publishing a summary in a report called *Open Doors*. At that time, 25,464 international students were enrolled on American campuses; as of the last *Open Doors* report in 2020, that number grew by over 4000 percent equaling roughly 1.1 million students representing 5.5% of total college and university enrollments in the country. In 1999, IIE began also collecting census data to include the number of U.S.-based students who studied abroad. That number has also grown dramatically, increasing from 143,590 students at the first census to 347,099 in 2019 (Institute of International Education, 2020).

However, international study is not a unique innovation of the 20th century. de Wit and Merckx (2012) argue that while many scholars believe that sojourners first traversed international borders aimed at learning in the 18th and 19th centuries, pilgrimages for scholarship were made much earlier during the Middle Ages. Punteney (2019) notes that “the tradition of wandering scholars dates back to ancient India and Greece, and probably earlier” (p. 100). The cumulative contemporary evolution of international study from one of individual activity to formal transnational study

experience has resulted in the formalization of the professional practice of international education (Brevis & Lucas, 2007; Deardorff, 2012).

This growth in student global mobility drove the creation of international student advising departments and professional development practice around supporting those students (Deardorff, 2012). “Universities have a responsibility to international students and scholars to ensure that they are integrated into the campus community and that they receive the support they need to be able to succeed in their academic and professional goals” (Punteney, 2019, p. 230). The staff that manage international student advising departments are the front line of support and service provided to international students while they are actively engaged in study abroad.

While international student advising offices typically support the incoming sojourners, study abroad advising offices provide support to the outgoing sojourners, meaning those who leave their home country and study in another country. “Historically, much of the effort expended in newly created international student advising offices was directly concerned with problems foreign students face in entrance requirements, economic difficulties, English language proficiency, and the like” (Hammer, 1992, p. 220).

In the modern era of international student and study abroad advising, attention to professional practice has expanded beyond this historically decentralized scope of transactional advising (Brevis, 2008; Deardorff, 2012). Thus, a network of professionals and scholars began to examine and study both best practices and outcomes of their work in an effort to strategically support and implement internationalization in higher education. (Deardorff, 2012). It is in their examination where some groundwork has been

laid to examine the impacts of an international study experience.

In her study examining the impact of international study on Vietnamese and Chinese students in Australia, Tran (2013) found “the international sojourners who have the courage and determination to move beyond their cultural comfort zone and work through intercultural experiences often possess the potential to be effectively engaged in transformative learning” (p. 124). For this proposed study, the researcher intends to study the long-term and transformative impact of the study abroad experience through the lens of Omani nationals who studied as international students in the United States. Thus, the researcher will examine current literature which discusses the impact of international study and introduce a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of transformative learning.

Though some of the literature is emerging from beyond American scholarship it has been largely studied through the lens of U.S-based students studying outside of the United States. Burgeoning research is forthcoming from Europe (Brown, 2009; Karakas, 2020; Nada et al., 2018; Okken, et al., 2019) and the Pacific, specifically Australia and New Zealand (Arthur et al, 2020; Singh, 2018; Tran, 2013). Much of the existing study abroad literature focuses narrowly on the immediate and largely on cultural competence and language development.

Much of the literature affirms that positive outcomes, especially those defined as transformative, rely on varying degrees of factors from the length of experience. For example, transformative impact may vary based on the location of study or the intentional use of reflective practice. However, ultimately, the literature mostly agrees the experience does foster growth and transformation (Arthur et al., 2020; Aydin, 2012; Brown, 2009;

Nada et al., 2018; Perry et al., 2012; Walters et al., 2017).

Roadmap for this Scholarly Review

The researcher endeavors to examine the gap in the existing literature regarding the long-term transformative impact of study abroad specifically as it relates to identity development. It is the researcher's position that international student practitioners can further foster meaning-making through intentional learning aimed at promoting critical reflection while students are engaged in the study abroad experience. Using a case study method employing Omani nationals, this research study seeks to address the following three research questions: 1.) How do Omani nationals who graduated from U.S. universities reflectively apply that experience in their daily lives? 2.) In what ways do Omanis believe their international study experience influences their identity? 3.) How do Omanis continue to make meaning of their study abroad experience?

To begin this literature review, the researcher will establish the terms used when referring to an international study experience by discussing literature that speaks to the already documented impacts of the international student experience. This will be followed by a review of recent literature examining the impact of studying abroad which specifically discusses study abroad as a transformational experience. Next, this literature review will discuss recent evidence of newly emerging themes that result as an impact on international study.

Given the three research questions are directly related to transformative learning, the final sections of this literature review will discuss the theory of transformative learning underpinning the researcher's study. Additionally, three conceptual threads already evident in the literature will be discussed since the researcher hopes to ascertain

evidence of their existence in the long-term outcome of study abroad.

The International Student Experience

Zhou and Cole (2017) found in their research that literature on the topic of international students is specifically lacking beyond understanding the immediate impact of cultural development. Due to this lack of information, practitioners are challenged in understanding what services to provide to these students. Arthur et al. (2020) recently determined that consensus on terminology is still up for debate, let alone understanding best practices and methodology for both capturing and fostering learning in international settings.

In this research, the terms international student and study abroad will not distinguish between U.S.-based students who go abroad or international students who study in the United States because the research intention is to examine the experience of the sojourn independent of the place of destination. As such, the use of terminologies such as international study, study abroad, and transnational study may be used interchangeably by the researcher.

The existing body of literature largely focuses on impacts of international study in the scholarly realms of acculturation, personal growth, and language development (Altbach, 1991; Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Barker & Westwood, 1990; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Lieb, 2016; Singh, 2018; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Wu et al., 2015) but there is burgeoning research focus on understanding a more transformative and expansive impact of transnational study (Barton & Ryan, 2020; Brown, 2009; DeGraaf et al., 2013; DiFrancesco et al., 2019; Gu, 2015; Karakas, 2020; Okken et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2012; Tran, 2013; Walters, et al., 2017). Within this new research, evidence is emerging that the

impact of study abroad is more expansive than cross-cultural and language growth and development.

Impact of Studying Abroad

Several recent studies have demonstrated evidence of transformational impacts as a result of study abroad. Walters et al. (2017) learned that while various factors affected the degree to which a short-term study abroad experience spurred transformation, the participant's likelihood of experiencing said transformation is high. Their study found that the impact "transcendences [sic] achievements such as passing the course or obtaining a degree, to a level of personal and professional maturation that positively impacts society in an altruistic humanitarian way" (p. 113).

Brown (2009) studied the immediate impact of the international student experience of studying abroad by examining reflections of 150 post-graduate international students studying the United Kingdom through using a lens of tourism sojourn impact. The study revealed monumental shifts in the student's understanding of their experience even while they were still actively engaged in the experience. Overwhelmingly, the students applied the experience to a newfound lifestyle:

Reflecting on the past year, students commented extensively on changes in their personal attitudes to life. This common theme of conversation in Interview 4 vindicates the wide-spread emphasis in the literature on transition on the power of the sojourn to effect changes in outlook; all interviewees confessed to life-changing developments in philosophy and behaviour. (p. 509)

There is also evidence that study abroad participation spurs thoughtful consideration of personal change.

Aydin (2012) examined 23 pre-service teachers in graduate language departments who returned to Turkey after participating in ERASMUS, a European study abroad program aimed at skills sharing, human resource development, and international study. Through interviews and reflective essays, the study found that participants were able to articulate something indeed had changed within them notably as it related to personal development.

One study illuminated international student's challenges as a precipice for transformation. Tran's (2013) study of Asian students studying in Australia found that those who study abroad have a predilection for engaging in self-work that leads to transformation. Through interviews and prompted essay writing, eight students from both Vietnam and China studying Education and Economics were asked to reflect on their experiences in Australian writing classes. "The international students in this study indicated that an initial source of challenge and stress could provide the foundation for personal growth, and the enrichment of knowledge" (p. 135). Those students also typically embrace "an aspiration to transform themselves" (p. 137) as part of the experience of international study.

Okken, et al. (2019) researched the long-term effects of 17 Dutch teachers who had studied abroad during their teaching internships and found that the impact of such an experience endured well after the experience itself. Okken's study expanded on a previous study by Dolby (2004) which found that study abroad "not only provides the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself" (p. 150). The teachers in the study expressed that the impact of their study abroad informed both their teaching philosophy and educational values.

DiFrancesco et al. (2019) further investigated the impact of study abroad by applying it to work on “self” by examining the impact of short-term, week-long study abroad. The outcomes showed that a:

new identity could be formed as a result of students’ experiences as that of openness and willingness to work with other cultures and this could be explored further in future research due to how mentions of more identification were found after study abroad experiences. (p. 26)

There is also evidence that learning occurs beyond the campus when studying abroad. Nada, et al. (2018) discovered that students who studied abroad gained learning beyond their experiences on the formal learning spaces (e.g., campuses) in the foreign country and that regardless of the experience, the impact was demonstrable. Through narrative inquiry of 12 Portuguese students who studied abroad, the study found that even though students may have different experiences while abroad, “learning is embedded in the international sojourn” (p. 702).

There are many personal impacts one experiences after a study abroad experience. Notably, contemporary examination has revealed that a change within oneself and one’s values may be recognized and articulated by those who have returned from abroad (Brown, 2009; DiFrancisco 2019; Nada, 2018; Tran, 2013; Walters, 2017) Beyond just understanding that a transformation has occurred, there are other outcomes of the experience that are being explored in the literature.

Emerging Themes

Contemporary literature has increasingly begun to reflect the impact of an international study experience on participants’ enthusiasm for civic and community

engagement and on developing a more cosmopolitan mindset. This is encouraging though it is important to recognize how these effects may vary among those returning from study abroad depending on a myriad of factors. The following section will discuss increased citizenship engagement as an emerging impact of study abroad noted in recent literature. Further it will highlight literature that has recently discussed participant's expressed expansion of a cosmopolitan identity. Lastly, there will be a discussion on understanding how the impact of study abroad varies across experiences.

Citizenship Engagement

A recent study compared how students who studied abroad directly connected that experience to their interest in civic engagement against students who did not study abroad. DeGraaf et al. (2013) surveyed 354 students who studied abroad and indicated that those who studied abroad found more motivation to be engaged in the community than those who did not. One proposed reason for this is the student's desire "to model their lifestyle in the United States after the habits they engaged in while in another culture, these behaviors included shopping at local markets, living close to the land, and riding public transportation of various kinds" (p. 47).

The DeGraaf et al. (2013) study also found that individuals who had studied abroad were more likely to incorporate their international experiences into their daily lives through their personal relationships, not only during the experience itself but also well after. Participants in the study repeatedly expressed the same sentiment to "demonstrate that a semester abroad does influence peer-to-peer relationships positively, and that those relationships play an important role in students' experiences while abroad and after returning home" (p. 54).

Paige et al. (2009) administered a survey to over 20,000 study abroad returnees yielding 6391 respondents. This study aimed to determine if those who studied abroad demonstrated more citizenship engagement. Over 90% of the responses indicated that they participate in voter activity and 73.2% responded that they “made a purchasing decision because of the social or political values of a company” (p. s37). This study aimed to determine if those who studied abroad demonstrated more global engagement. Further, over half of the responses indicated frequent volunteerism in philanthropic activity.

In a case study on four cohorts of students participating in a global citizenship certificate program in addition to their undergraduate curriculum, Hendershot and Sperandio (2009) examined students' considerations of impact. A component of the program was a study abroad experience. The study included an open- ended questionnaire where students recounted what they believed to be impacts of their participation in the program. Students responded that they believed their study abroad experience to be the most impactful. Several students noted that study abroad impacted their interest in civic interests. One student recounted that the study abroad experience was enlightening and spurring her to incorporate civic minded activity into her work as an architect.

Cosmopolitan Identity

In his examination of Turkish scholars upon their return after studying abroad, Karakas (2020) observed participants noting new formed ways of thought. They brought with them a preference for a more cosmopolitan way of thought and predilection “to embrace a transnational perspective upon their return from study abroad to adjust into

social, cultural, and academic environments at home by reconstructing their perceptions of the home through the lenses of their transnational(ized) identity” (p. 257).

Hendershot and Sperandio (2009) found in their study that students reflected on a change within themselves after participating in their study abroad experiences. Students noted enhanced feelings of altruism and thinking of others. One student noted, “I think another huge thing is the ability to act and not only acknowledge that there are other cultures and other people and ways that they think is different, but to actually do something.” (p. 49).

In a study examining American students who studied in Australia, Dolby (2004) endeavored to understand how participants negotiate their understanding of their national identity. Many students expressed shifting priorities as part of their American identity and the study:

In beginning to understand the multiple articulations of “America,” the contradictions of the “state” and the “nation,” and the ways in which an American self can be decentered and remade, many of the students in this study began to embrace a nascent form of cosmopolitanism. (p. 172)

Varied Impact

There is also evidence that the impact varies among participants and programs. Arthur et al. (2020) studied 37 newly returned pre-service teachers who were on 10-week teaching placements abroad. In examining their immediate reflections of the experience, they noted that their understanding of the experience was still developing but more importantly, noted the impact of the experience varied among participants and that

while major themes did cut across all the returning teachers, their unique understanding of their experiences differed. This indicates that the impact of the international experience does not necessarily produce the same results for every participant even when patterns and themes do.

In a survey sent to over 500 students from the United Kingdom Findlay et al. (2011) wanted to understand their motivations for seeking opportunities to study abroad. While this examination was not ultimately seeking to understand impact, it did find evidence that analyzing international study should not be confined to only one's academic pursuits. "International student mobility is therefore not only about gaining the kinds of formal knowledge that can be imparted through high-quality university training (that could arguably be offered by a leading national university in a student's home country of origin) but also about other socially and culturally constructed knowledges" (p. 128).

Nada et al. (2018) also found that the learning experience from studying abroad could not be necessarily applied equally to every student. "Not all students have the same international experience and certainly not all students relate to the learning opportunities provided by their sojourns in the same way" (p. 708).

Summary

Contemporary literature examining the impact of study abroad has begun to highlight emerging themes. Study abroad participants have started to express civic engagement as an outcome of their study abroad experience. Additionally, studies have started to identify themes of increased cosmopolitan thoughts through participants' reflection on their own identity. While the literature documenting the impacts of study

abroad continues to evolve, it is important to note that experiences vary depending on multiple factors such as length and location of the experience.

Transformative Learning Theory

Much of the literature is underpinned in the understanding that one of the fundamental experiences of an international student is flanked by two distinct experiences: the initial culture shock and the re-entry culture shock. Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) coined the term “culture shock” when discussing the discombobulating challenges of missionaries in foreign lands. He described the experience as feeling like a fish out of water.

One aspect of the theory of culture shock is confusion in one’s role and purpose in society which causes one to become disoriented. “No matter how broad-minded or full of goodwill you may be, a series of props have been knocked from under you, followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety” (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). This experience of having one’s innately understood, and universal laws removed from their understanding and lived experience leads to the disorienting dilemma phase of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning which provides the theoretical framework for this study.

Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning

In the 1970s, Jack Mezirow used a grounded theory approach to examine rising college enrollments of women. Rooted in the constructivist assumption, Mezirow’s (1991) theory supposes that meaning is made intrinsically and continues to change in its application as new experiences occur.

Specific constructivist assumptions underlying transformation theory include a conviction that meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such

as books and that the personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communication. (p. 40)

Mezirow (2009) posited ten phases that lead to transformative learning. The phases are flanked by what he calls frames of references which are “a coherent body of experience--associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses--frames of reference that define their life world” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

One’s frames of references guide them through their daily lived experience but when those frames are challenged, stress and disorientation occur. It is through this stress and disorientation that critical analysis and reflection must endure and ultimately create change. Thus, the ten phases of transformation occur. Those phases are:

1. A disorienting dilemma,
2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective. (Mezirow, 1991)

While each of the ten phases of transformation can be applied to the sojourner's journey through their international learning experience, the first phase, a disorienting dilemma, and the last phase, a reintegration into one's life, bookend the initial culture shock, and ultimate re-entry culture shock of a study abroad experience as earlier defined by Oberg (1960).

Mezirow (1991) posited that change, or transformation, occurs when an identity-altering dilemma exists and must be overcome. "Perspective transformation can occur either through an accretion of transformed meaning schemes resulting from a series of dilemmas or in response to an externally imposed epochal dilemma" (p. 1901). Such disorienting dilemmas challenge existing perspectives and can be packaged in a variety of events such as loss of jobs, sudden illness, or overcoming the experience of culture shock.

Illeris (2017) also examined historical definitions of learning. He posited that any permanent change because of external experience, and outside of natural evolution, is defined as learning. He deliberately left his definition broad, noting that what is important is that "learning implies a change that is permanent to some extent or other, for example, until it is overlaid by new learning, or is gradually forgotten because the organism no longer uses it" (p. 3).

The process of studying abroad requires successfully navigating through cultural and societal differences which often lead to enhanced learning. The participants in Tran's (2013) study of Chinese and Vietnamese students studying in Australia found that they often connected works of hardship (e.g., struggle, challenge, hard) to learning and growth. Additionally, in a study of cohorted global curriculum programs which included

study abroad as a required component, Hendershot and Sperandio (2009) quotes participants describing such moments as experiences “of critical incidents and challenging or defining moments (referred to colloquially as ‘ah-ha moments’)” (p. 49).

Conceptual Threads

The study will also draw on Dewey’s (1933) definition of reflection and Illeris’ (2014) work connecting identity to transformative learning to explore three conceptual threads: *reflective application, making meaning, and negotiating identity*.

Mezirow (1997) noted that transformative learning sprouted from various intentional activities that, though they might occur without provocation, ultimately brought about internal change. “A significant personal transformation involving subjective reframing, that is, transforming one's own frame of reference, often occurs in response to a disorienting dilemma through a three-part process: critical reflection on one's assumptions, discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and action” (p. 60).

Reflective Application

John Dewey’s 1933 research theorized that reflection is fundamental to thinking, and ultimately, learning. He further posited that it does not happen simply by prompted response but also in social and behavioral exercise. Dewey's theory also proposed that learning does not happen by chance. “Thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; it doesn’t not appear just on ‘general principles.’ There is something specific with occasions and provokes it” (p. 12). This idea that an act or an occasion sparks transformation predicated Mezirow’s later theory defining this act as the disorienting dilemma. The application of reflection creates an opportunity to negotiate the original

meaning derived from the experience and to then apply new meaning given one's current reality or lived experience.

Mezirow's transformative learning included reflective activity as a key component in the experience of adult learning. In fact, he made them synonymous. In 1991, Mezirow stated, "learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action" (p. 1). Such revision or reinterpretation can be sought using the intentional exercise of reflection.

Mezirow (1990) defined the term of reflection further in that it is not so much as thinking back on an event in the previous experience, but more so to reassess that event and apply meaning given new understandings of our reality. He called this process "critical reflection."

Perry et al. (2012) found that critical reflection was imperative to the learning outcomes of a short-term study abroad experience and ultimately what sets it apart from merely a vacation. "The critical moment where learners have engaged with something novel, whether it is physical or psychological, is when reflection and critical reflection become imperative to the learning" (p. 682). Walters et al. (2017) also asserted that formalized processes during faculty-led study programs must include the teaching and fostering of critical reflection activities for maximum meaning to be made.

Block (1997) examined the literature then existing on negotiation of self by second language learners. In doing so, he noted that the effect of the experience requires reflection when he stated "...identity is, at least to some extent, a self-conscious, reflexive project..." (p. 865).

In 2004, Colapietro endeavored to connect Dewey's work on reflective learning and transformation. In what ties directly to Mezirow's disorienting dilemma, he theorized that change transformation requires time:

There is simply no way of jumping outside of the history of our inheritances, no way of divesting ourselves of our language and other institutions, least of all by a single stroke or decisive move. Even so, we can in time twist ourselves free, but this is an ongoing (or interminable) process. (p. 66)

Colapietro (2004) ultimately posited that Dewey's understanding of one's ability to transform is in essence, the most characteristic trait of humans. In summary, reflection and transformation is an inherited human practice.

There is also evidence in recent literature that intentional reflection brings forth transformative thoughts. Barton and Ryan (2020) found that students studying in Australia had the ability to be transformed, specifically through formalized reflection practice. Their study, which analyzed results of interviews and survey responses of international students who participated in work-placement while studying abroad, determined that intentional reflective practices produced a better environment for goal attainment for students.

Reflection of the experience does not only occur in intentional reflective exercise. Hendershot and Sperandio (2009) found that when students were asked about their study abroad experience, they noted they continue to reflect on the experience. The students noted that they continued discussing their study abroad opportunity years after the actual trip with not only those who went with them, but with others who had similar experiences.

Making Meaning

Mezirow (1997) discussed meaning and its role in transformative learning. Without applying meaning to an experience through various examinations of frames of references, the cause is not made because doing so requires purposeful intent. “To become meaningful, learning requires that new information be incorporated by the learner into an already well-developed symbolic frame of reference, an active process involving thought, feelings, and disposition” (p. 10).

Nada et al., (2018) suggested that the impact of study abroad does induce transformative learning. Reflections of previous study abroad participants “suggest that engaging in an international sojourn can constitute an enhancer of transformative learning, because major changes in international students’ meaning perspectives were shown to occur during their experience of living and studying in a foreign country” (p.709).

At a 2006 conference, Mezirow engaged in dialogue with contemporary transformative theorist John Dirkx wherein he further elaborated on the impact of transformation as it occurs within the frames of references. He posited that the transformed frames become “more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p. 124). This change occurs outside of one’s own awareness that a process is taking place and through reflection, meaning is molded.

Mezirow further explored discourse as the vehicle by which meaning is examined and ultimately assigned. “Discourse here refers to a dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings and values” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Chambers (2007) examined the long-term assumptions held by former Peace Corps volunteers who all noted that even

decades later, they were continuing to reapply the meaning of their experience to their current reality. DeGraaf et al. (2013) found that when asked to discuss the experience of international study and long-term effects, students remarked that they continue to talk about and think about the experience almost daily.

In examining how study abroad participants make meaning after their experience, Kortegast and Boisfontaine (2015) interviewed 13 students after a short-term program experience in Spain. One finding demonstrated that all students consistently expressed a keen desire to discuss their experiences with classmates, friends, and family. Their study determined that providing opportunities for intentional reflection and discussion opened up substantial room for meaning discovery.

Through the continual revisiting of and discussion about the experience of studying in another country, beneficiaries apply and make meaning well after they have completed their international study. As such, Mezirow (2003) asserts that “one may also reasonably contend that a given judgment is a supportable tentative conclusion on which to act until a new perspective, evidence, or argument is encountered and validated through critical- dialectical discourse” (p. 61).

Identity

Brown (2009) found that individuals who studied abroad began to reexamine their world views and beliefs after the experience and through discourse, brought forth different meanings. “This requires the sojourner to look at their world from a different point of view, which is often in conflict with personal values and beliefs: when they have an experience that cannot be assimilated into their original meaning perspective, the experience is rejected or the perspective changes to accommodate the new experience”

(p. 508). Tran's (2013) research on international students' transformative work while in their country of study found that a new self-identity is brought forth through the hardships endured during the experience.

Hajo et al. (2018) recently explored the connection between living abroad and themes of self-concept clarity. Through a mixed-methods study of over 1,874 individuals who lived abroad, they found that the length of time abroad also plays an important factor in the amount of impact on self-concept. Their research "suggests that going far from home can lead one closer to the self, with implications for significant life decisions" (p. 16). Specifically, the studies indicated that reflecting on time abroad, provided more insight for self-discretion than reflection on time spent at home.

In studying the impact of study abroad on European teachers, Osler (2006) found that the experience of international study expanded their sense of identity, especially as applied through the lens of citizenship. "For many, perhaps the majority, the experience of studying and living in another country has caused them to re-examine their own attitudes and values and for some it has reinforced their own sense of national identity" (p. 94).

In his research on identity and second language learning, Block (1997) noted identity is not something fixed in time but rather "fragmented and context in nature" (p. 864). He further tied geographic location and self together when examining the phenomena through an individual's existence in an unfamiliar location when he stated "when individuals move across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilised and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance" (p. 864).

Early in his scholarship, Knud Illeris (2004) began attempting to modernize Mezirow's initial work by rethinking what is meant by *learning*. Departing from previous psychological work on self, he expanded the concept of personality change tying it directly to the concept of learning. "There is also a far-reaching type of learning, employing what could be termed personality change and characterised by simultaneous restructuring in the cognitive, the emotional, and the social dimensions" (p. 84). Ultimately, Illeris theorized that learning should be a side effect of change in self and that acquisition of knowledge does not occur outside of a delta within one's self. More recently, Illeris (2014) endeavored to redefine transformative learning by understanding what the ultimate intended outcome is. In doing so, he proposed that transformative learning and identity are synonymous.

By referring to the concept of identity in relation to transformative learning, the very definition will comprise a criterion of importance concerning changes that can be considered transformations because the concept of identity obviously only includes matters of a certain importance in relation to the mental totality of the individual. (p. 154)

As Illeris' (2017) work evolved, he began to align the concept of transformation with identity. He states that "that individuals today are and must be constantly considering and addressing their self-perception" (p. 184). He overlaid this idea of consistent evaluation through challenging life experiences.

Especially this is important when the life situation is radically changed, for example when a new job is started, an education is initiated or finished, when we retire, are fired, move to a new place, start or break off a relationship—or other

similar events which place us in an entirely different situation—and especially organizational and administrative changes occur much more frequently today than earlier. (p. 185)

The literature on study abroad largely agrees that concept of self is embedded in the experience of international student mobility (Dolby, 2004; Brown, 2009; Paige et al., 2009; DeGraaf et al., 2013; Gu, 2015; Walters et al., 2017; Nada et al., 2018; DiFrancesco et al., 2019; Okken et al., 2019; Karakas, 2020). In congruence with transformative learning, a shift in self is routinely a reported outcome of the experience of studying transnationally. As Brown put it “attitudinal change was irrevocable” (p. 509).

It is the position of the researcher that the three themes, reflective application, making meaning, and self-identify development work in tandem. Though reflective application and making meaning may develop simultaneously, the ultimate goal is self-identity development. Through the process of reflection, meaning is derived, and the self is ultimately examined. An international study experience provides the unique components of the transformative environment through which to examine the likelihood of this process.

Summary

It is evident that international education practitioners and scholars believe the act of transnational study brings forth numerous transformative benefits. It is also evident that students want opportunities to study internationally more so than ever before. While the passion for supporting and encouraging study abroad exists, understanding how one will continually apply that experience and make meaning it for the rest of their lives is yet

to be thoroughly explored. Doing so will offer opportunities for practitioners to investigate current best practices and implement innovative methodology into on-campus programming that would foster life-long learning skills such as critical reflection and discourse.

Mezirow (2003) intended for the tenants of transformative learning to be taught as a matter of curriculum and training in adult learning. He wrote that students “may also have to be helped to transform his or her frame of reference to fully understand the experience” (p. 10). Educators who work with international students or students studying abroad may be able to develop support services that foster transformative learning practices.

The goal of this research will be to learn in what ways Omani citizens who studied in the United States continue to reflect on their experience and incorporate new meanings throughout their lives. Ultimately, international educators who incorporate opportunities to prepare students for the work that will foster meaning and aid in conceptualizing one’s self and identity development post-study abroad will better equip those individuals to apply the experience in their everyday lives. This study will contribute long-term impact and identity development through making meaning and critical reflection to the existing body of literature on the transformative impact of study abroad. Thus, this research will foster the furthering of the field of international education as it evolves to meet the growing demand for global study opportunities.

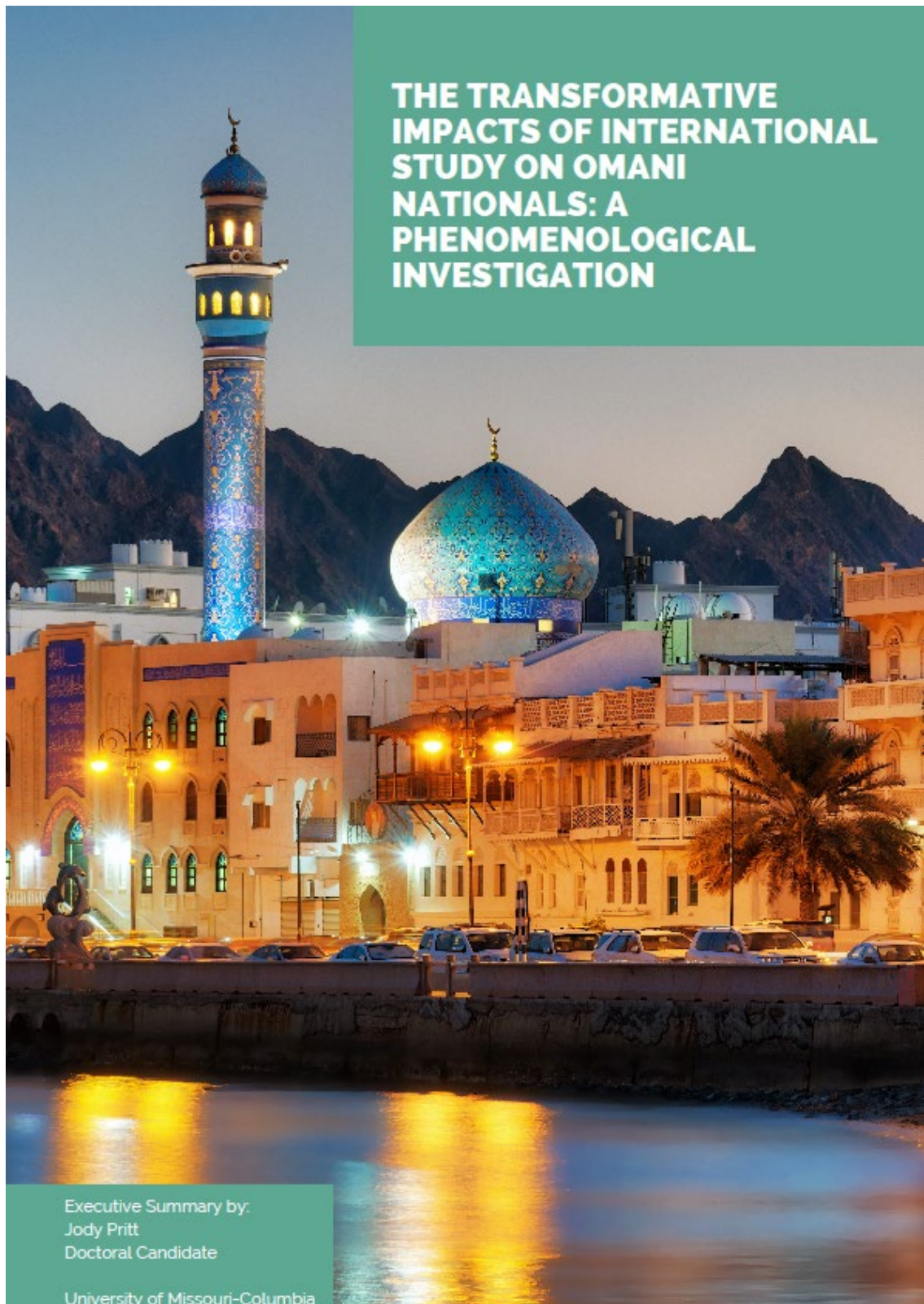
SECTION FOUR:

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Distribution of Practitioner Contribution

The researcher created a conference poster to present at the 2022 NAFSA: Association of International Educators annual conference in May/June 2022 in Denver, Colorado. The researcher will present the findings of her study both in person at the conference and electronically through NAFSA's virtual platform. The executive summary is designed to mirror a PowerPoint presentation which can subsequently be used for future presentation proposals. The poster will present the study and its findings. Additionally, the researcher will provide printed copies of the executive summary should audience members wish to receive one. The goal of the poster presentation will be to showcase the study results and the implications for international education practitioners as they advise students who are studying abroad.

Executive Summary



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is scant research about the concept of self-identity in the transformational experience of the international sojourner. Specifically lacking is literature discussing the impact of the experience in an international setting (outside of the U.S.) after students graduate. Brown (2009) and Paige, et al., (2009) both found that the international student experience does have long-term implications. There is still little known about how beneficiaries of study abroad continue to incorporate the impacts of their experience throughout their life. In a study examining Chinese and Vietnamese student experiences in Australia, Tran (2013) found that the experience of studying transnationally is a "springboard for the emergence of the newly constructed self" (p. 137). Documenting and analyzing the long-term impacts on the international student's identity will inform international education professionals who are challenged in "how to capture and support the learning processes that occur through international experiences" (Arthur et al., 2020, p. 2).

Providing support to international students aimed only at on-campus success meets a primary need but implementing further services that introduce skills that promote reflection and meaning-making will foster learning well beyond the on-campus experience. Barton and Ryan (2020) proposed that "in order to make and connect meanings in their specific learning contexts, international students can be explicitly taught how to reflect" (p. 3). Giving international students the opportunity to consider how they might intentionally and actively make meaning of their experience, and to consider that possibility while they are still engaged in the action of studying abroad itself, creates opportunities for practitioners to educate and prepare them for navigating after they return home.



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to glean an understanding of the long-term impacts on study abroad participants' concept of self-identity and to also examine transformative learning experiences in an international setting. Data collected from Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman will inform international education practitioners on the lasting impact of the international student experience after graduation.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The research design was a qualitative research study using a phenomenological approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Incorporating a phenomenological approach serves to assist the researcher in her goal of examining and describing the lived experience (Seidman, 2019) of the participants in the study. Mertens (2020) explained that phenomenology aims to describe the experience "from the point of view of the participant" (p. 255). Therefore, this approach will provide a foundation for Omanis to "arrive at structural descriptions" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227) of their study abroad experience.

Personal interviews and focus groups were implemented to garner description of the post-study abroad experience, while reflective oral history was used to gather evolving concepts on self and concepts of identity shifts. Seidman (2019) stated that a phenomenological approach in interviewing is used to "enrich lived experience by mining its meaning" (p. 19). Through this approach, the research questions were addressed in an effort to discover "the essence or basic structure of" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227) study abroad.

In January 2022, the researcher traveled to Muscat, the cosmopolitan capital of Oman to conduct the study. She conducted the interviews and focus groups with 16 Omani nationals on-site to familiarize herself with the setting and support phenomenological study methodology. In doing so, she positioned herself in the participants' home country and culture. She interacted within the lived experiences of the participants and was more directly able to see understanding of their points of view and how they derive meaning in their daily lives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning

- Mezirow's 10 phases to transformation mirror cultural shock theory.
- Posits that one's experience and background shape their reflective lens to make meaning.
- Disorienting dilemmas challenge frames of reference spurring change.
- Reflection is a catalyst for making-meaning and concept of identity examination.

Three Conceptual Threads

- Reflective Application
- Making Meaning
- Identity

Dewey's definition of reflection

- Reflection is
 - Active
 - Persistent
 - Careful Considerate

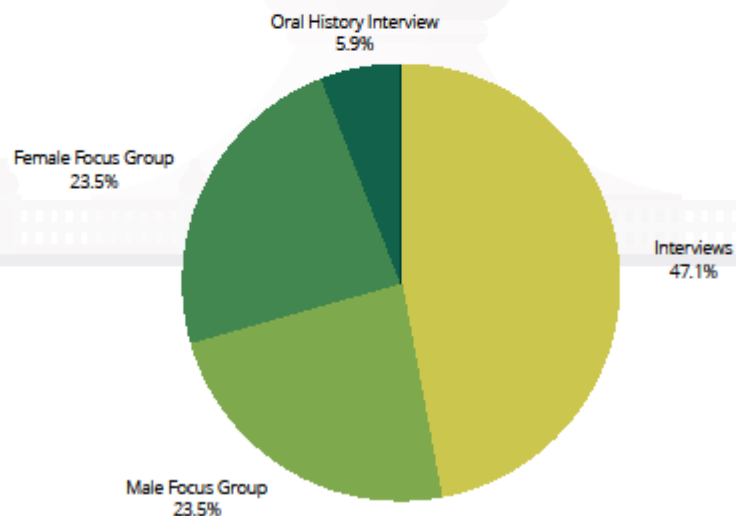
Illeris' work on identity

- Transformative Learning=Identity

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do Omani nationals who graduated from U.S. universities reflectively apply that experience in their daily lives?
- In what ways do Omanis believe their international study experience influences their identity?
- How do Omanis continue to make meaning of their study abroad experience?

**Case Study
n=16**



QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Prepare the Data

The researcher prepared the data by establishing an anonymized and secure electronic filing system. Each interview, the focus group, and the oral history telling were digitally recorded and transcribed and then stored in the electronic filing system creating a repository for the data. The researcher thoroughly read each transcript to familiarize herself with the text. Then the researcher re-read each transcript to line-number (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and set preliminary codes. Member checks (Siedman, 2019) were implemented among a random selection of participants in addition to select passages that the researcher deemed necessary.

Explore the Data

The researcher explored the data by consolidating initial codes and identifying emerging themes and patterns. This allowed for identifying further opportunities to reduce the data and construct categorical themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher conducted coding, annotated notes, and highlighting electronically in the transcripts stored in the OneDrive within NVIVO, a qualitative research analysis software system.

Reduce the Data

The researcher reduced the data and formalized categories that captured the themes which had emerged. The researcher reviewed the newly created and established thematic categories as she started deriving meaning and application from the data. The researcher also identified and recorded concepts that emerged from the data which "identify what themes cut across the questions" (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 155).

Additional Analysis

An additional layer of analysis for the focus group and oral history data was implemented. Krueger & Casey (2015) recommend making notes during the focus groups that speak to the environment during the data collection. This differs from Seidman's (2019) advice to separate the interview data collection from analysis. The researcher incorporated Krueger and Casey's (2015) suggestion during the focus groups. The researcher recorded voice notes using Otter.ai transcription application to quickly document field notes which were later typed in the data repository.

A systematic approach to analysis was implemented for all gathered data. Substantial planning and implementation occurred well before in-country research, including the dissemination of informed consent forms (see Appendices F and G). Debriefing, organizing, and coding typically commenced immediately after data collection while the researcher was still in Oman. Consistency of analysis was a goal across all points of data collection (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

FINDINGS

- Persistent Active Reflection
- Advocating for the Experience
- Broadened Personal Connections
- Considering their Self-Identity

"I came back different."

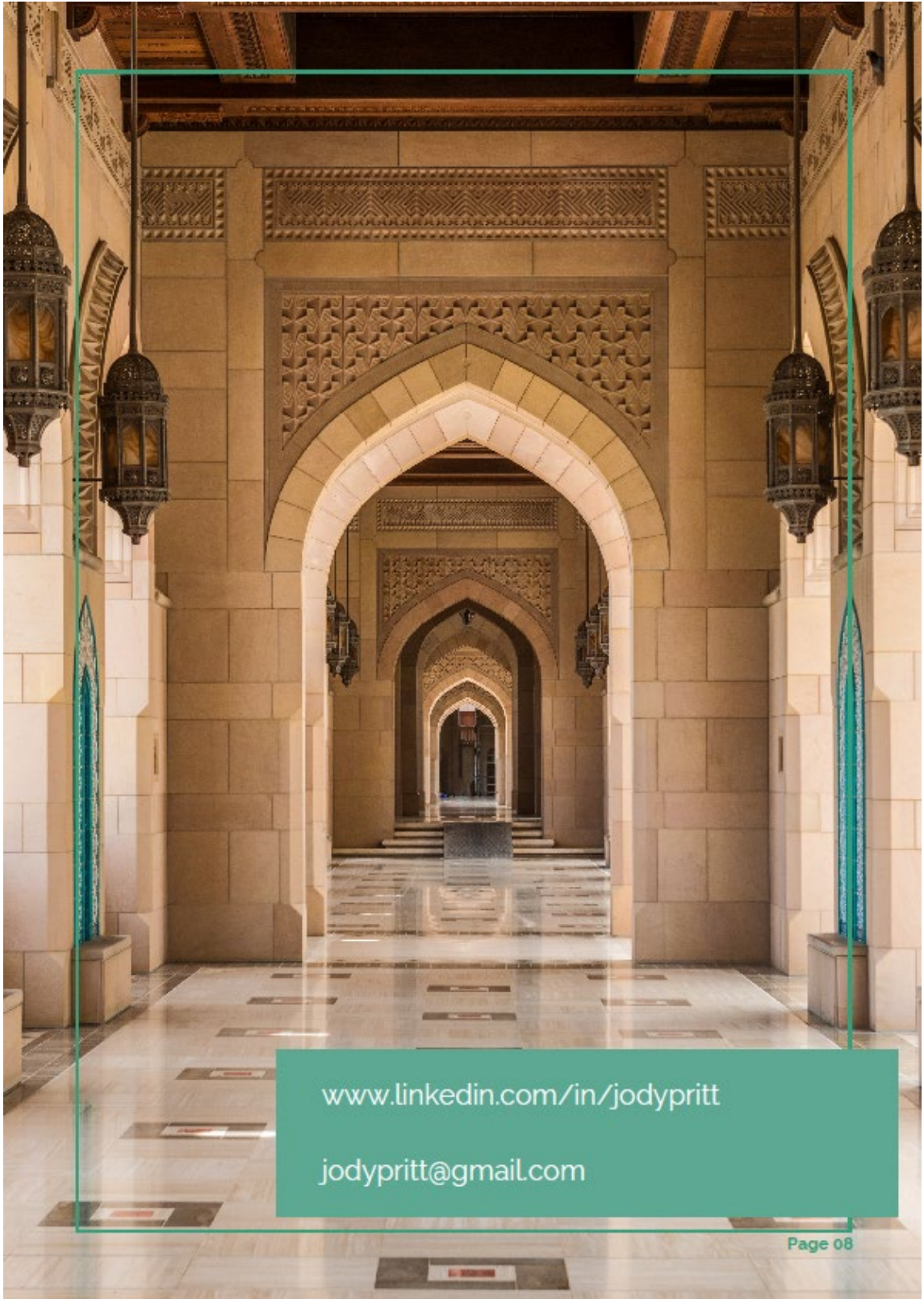
"I am totally, 100% not the same person."

"I left that person in Oman and returned back home a totally different person."

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study revealed that when international students leave their study abroad location and return home, the experience not only remains with them, but they also continue to revisit the experience and derive shifting meanings from it which inform their concept of self identity.

- The study provides a springboard for further examination from outside the western viewpoint.
- The study contributes to the professional development of international education practitioners.
- The study provides evidence that can be parlayed into practical application for advisors.
- The study allows for a reconsideration of professional and scholarship motivations.



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Research Poster

THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON OMANI NATIONALS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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 Jody Pritt, EdD
 University of Missouri-Columbia
 Director of International Student & Scholar Services at Georgia State University

Related literature

Aylin, S. (2007) "I am not the same after my ERASMUS": A qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report* 12(38), 1-23.

Barnes, G. & Ryan, M. (2005). What does reflection look and feel like for international students? An exploration of reflective thinking, reflexivity and employability. *Journal of International Students* 15(2), 1-6.

Dwyer, H. M., & Peters, C. K. (2004). The benefits of study abroad. *Transitions abroad*, 23(1), 56-58.

Karakas, A. (2020). Disrupting transnationality? The impact of study abroad educational experiences on Turkish returnee scholars' lives, careers and identity. *Research in Comparative & International Education* 15(2), 202-221. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ricie.2020.0022>

Nash, C. L., Houghton, C., & Anuj, N. C. (2018). "You went to Europe and returned different": Transformative learning experiences of international students in Portugal. *European Educational Research Journal*, 15(1), 691-710. <https://doi.org/10.1077/1474914818763324>

Pajka, R. M., Fry, G. W., Stebbins, E. M., Juhl, J., & Jin, J. E. (2005). Study abroad for global engagement: the long-term impact of mobility experiences. *International Education*, 20(4), 529-544.

Perry, L., Ooster, L., & Tarrant, M. (2002). More than a vacation: Short-term study abroad as a critically reflective, transformative learning experience. *Creative Education*, 3, 475-483. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2002.33020>

Tan, L. (2013). Transformative learning and international students negotiating higher education. In S. Lewis & H. Bultman (Eds.), *International students negotiating higher education: Critical perspectives*. Routledge.

Waters, C., Charles, J., & Bingham, S. (2017). Impact of short-term study abroad experiences on transformative learning: A comparison of programs at 6 weeks. *Journal of Transformative Education* 15(2), 103-120. <https://doi.org/10.1077/15413444166670504>

<p>Supporting the personal, academic, and professional goals of international students is a university-wide responsibility, but campus departments specifically designed to manage those supports are challenged to maintain contemporary and innovative practices to meet the needs of this ever-changing population. The focus is almost entirely on the experience that happens while the international students are at the host institution, but what happens when the student returns home?</p>	<h3>01 INTRODUCTION</h3> <p>Data collected from Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman will inform international education practitioners on the lasting impact of the international student experience after graduation.</p>	<h3>02 OBJECTIVE</h3> <p>The purpose of this study was to glean an understanding of the long-term impacts on study abroad participants' concept of self-identity and to also examine transformative learning experiences in an international setting.</p>	<h3>03 METHODOLOGY</h3> <p>Executing a qualitative research study method to capture data by implementing semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and narrative inquiry to support oral history telling, a phenomenological approach was used.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixteen participants (n=16). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Seven, three-part, 1-hour video interviews. ◦ Two focus groups, divided by gender. ◦ One oral history interview.
<h3>04 ANALYSIS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymized recruitment with informed consent. Confidential storage set-up. Pseudonym assignment. • Transcription application utilized to preserve authenticity of data. Multiple, in-depth transcript reviews. • Inductive analysis and axial coding to capture and synthesize main themes. 	<p>Several themes emerged from all 16 participants interviews. First, all participants noted that they persistently and actively reflect on the experience. Second, all participants noted encouraging study abroad within their spheres of influence. Lastly, the participants all expressed a feeling of dual identity both in being Omani and a newly acquired American sensibility. Each participant also articulated that their experience was unequivocally changed how they perceive themselves which fosters their advocacy for the experience to others.</p>	<h3>05 FINDINGS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent Active Reflection. The participants reflect upon their experience no matter how much time has passed. Even if reflections are negative, new meaning can be derived. • Advocating the Experience. Participants make meaning of their experience by advocating for it to others. They do this both actively and passively. • Broadened Personal Connections. The participants' note meeting people with different backgrounds as one of the best outcomes of the experience. Doing so continues to play an active role in their lived experiences. • Considering their Self-Identity. All participants indicated they were changed because of the experience and continue to believe the experience informs their own concept of self-identity. 	<h3>06 CONCLUSION</h3> <p>Studying abroad can foster personal development beyond acculturation. Participants in this study believe their experience impacted them in ways which they continue to apply in their daily lived experiences. They also demonstrate a direct connection to their concept of self and their experiences studying abroad. Moreover, participants continue to make meaning of their experience as they go.</p>

Research Poster Components

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON
OMANI NATIONALS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION**

A silhouette of a city skyline featuring several domes and minarets, likely representing a Middle Eastern or Islamic architectural style. The skyline is positioned at the bottom of the title area, partially overlapping the word 'INVESTIGATION'.

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University

Related literature

Aydn, S. (2012) "I am not the same after my ERASMUS": A qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(28): 1–23.

Barton, G. & Ryan, M. (2020). What does reflection look and feel like for international students? An exploration of reflective thinking, reflexivity and employability. *Journal of International Students* 10(S2), 1-16.

Dwyer, M. M., & Peters, C. K. (2004). The benefits of study abroad. *Transitions abroad*, 37(5), 56-58.

Karakas, A. (2020). Disciplining transnationality? The impact of study abroad educational experiences on Turkish returnee scholars' lives, careers and identity. *Research in Comparative & International Education* 15(3), 252-272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499920946223>

Nada, C. I., Montgomery, C., & Araújo, H. C. (2018). 'You went to Europe and returned different': Transformative learning experiences of international students in Portugal. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(5), 696–713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904118765334>

Paige, R. M., Fry, G. W., Stallman, E. M., Josiü, J., & Jon, J. E. (2009). Study abroad for global engagement: the long-term impact of mobility experiences. *Intercultural Education*, 20(supl), S29-S44.

Perry, L., Stoner, L., & Tarrant, M. (2012). More than a vacation: Short-term study abroad as a critically reflective, transformative learning experience. *Creative Education*, 3, 679-683. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2012.35101>

Tran, L. (2013) Transformative learning and international students negotiating higher education. In S Sovic & M. Blythman (Eds.), *International students negotiating higher education. Critical perspectives*. Routledge.

Walters, C., Charles, J., & Bingham, S. (2017). Impact of short-term study abroad experiences on transformative learning: A comparison of programs at 6 weeks. *Journal of Transformative Education* 15(2). 103-121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344616670034>

Supporting the personal, academic, and professional goals of international students is a university-wide responsibility, but campus departments specifically designed to manage those supports are challenged to maintain contemporary and innovative practices to meet the needs of this ever-changing population. The focus is almost entirely on the experience that happens while the international students are at the host institution, but what happens when the student returns home?

01 INTRODUCTION

Data collected from Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman will inform international education practitioners on the lasting impact of the international student experience after graduation.

02 OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to glean an understanding of the long-term impacts on study abroad participants' concept of self-identity and to also examine transformative learning experiences in an international setting.

03 **METHODOLOGY**



Executing a qualitative research study method to capture data by implementing semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and oral history telling was used to support a phenomenological approach.

- Sixteen participants (n=16).
 - Seven, three-part, 1-hour video interviews.
 - Two focus groups, divided by gender.
 - One oral history interview.

04 ANALYSIS

- Anonymized recruitment with informed consent. Confidential storage set-up. Pseudonym assignment.
- Transcription application utilized to preserve authenticity of data. Multiple, in-depth transcript reviews.
- Inductive analysis and axial coding to capture and synthesize main themes.

Several themes emerged from the data. First, all participants noted that they **persistently and actively reflect** on the experience. Second, all participants noted **encouraging study abroad** within their spheres of influence. Lastly, the participants all expressed a feeling of **dual identity** both in being Omani and a newly acquired American sensibility. Each participant also articulated that their experience was **unequivocally changed** how they perceive themselves which fosters their advocacy for the experience to others.



05

FINDINGS

- **Persistent Active Reflection.** The participants reflect upon their experience no matter how much time has passed. Even if reflections are negative, new meaning can be derived.
- **Advocating the Experience.** Participants make meaning of their experience by advocating for it to others. They do this both actively and passively.
- **Broadened Personal Connections.** The participants' note meeting people with different backgrounds as one of the best outcomes of the experience. Doing so continues to play an active role in their lived experiences.
- **Considering their Self-Identity.** All participants indicated they were changed because of the experience and continue to believe the experience informs their own concept of self-identity.

06 CONCLUSION

Studying abroad can foster personal development beyond acculturation. Participants in this study believe their experience impacted them in ways which they continue to apply in their daily lived experiences. They also demonstrate a direct connection to their concept of self and their experiences studying abroad. Moreover, participants continue to make meaning of their experience as they age.

SECTION FIVE:

PLAN FOR CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

As a contribution to scholarship, the below manuscript will be submitted to the Journal of International Students (JIS), a peer-reviewed journal on international education which seeks to “actively speak to the most consequential conversations in international education” (Journal of International Students, 2021). The JIS welcomes and encourages manuscripts on a variety of themes. This proposed article will fall under the following:

- Intersectional explorations of language, culture, and identity
- New geographies of student, academic, and scientific mobility
- Transnational identities, networks, and communities. (Journal of International Students, 2021)

Journal Article

The transformative impacts of international study on Omani nationals: A phenomenological investigation.

Jody Pritt

University of Missouri-Columbia

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and understand the long-term impacts on study abroad participants' concept of self-identity and to also examine transformative learning experiences in an international setting. Using a qualitative research design guided by a phenomenological approach and underpinned in Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, the researcher collected data from 16 Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman. Findings suggest that participants of study abroad persistently reflect on the experience for the rest of their lives and prefer diverse connections, personally and professionally. Further findings suggest that their concept of self-identity now straddles both their nationality and an American sensibility fused together in their lived experience. These experiences bolster meaning-making for participants through such activities as advocating, either actively or passively, for study abroad to others in their spheres of influence.

Keywords: international students, study abroad, transformative learning, self-identity, making meaning, qualitative research, Oman.

Introduction

Leaving home and traveling thousands of miles to study in another country can be a transformative experience. The challenges that accompany such endeavors may be great, but they do not overshadow the benefits of the experience which are plentiful, both in and outside the classroom. There are well documented outcomes of study abroad leading to personal growth, development of cultural competence, language development, and employability (Altbach, 1991; Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Barker & Westwood, 1990; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Lieb, 2016; Singh, 2018; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Wu et al., 2015).

Supporting the personal, academic, and professional goals of international students while they are studying abroad is an institution-wide responsibility, but campus departments specifically designed to manage those supports are challenged to maintain contemporary and innovative practices to meet the needs of this ever-changing population. The focus is almost entirely on the experience that happens while the students are at the host institution, but how do departments provide support that prepares students for when they return home?

To more definitively understand the long-term impact of study abroad, it is imperative to examine how students apply and make meaning of the experience well beyond their time on campus. Transformative learning does not end with the event itself but requires an application of critical reflection (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2003). In their recent exploration of reflective response to study abroad, Barton and Ryan (2020) stated that “given international students are likely to have diverse cultural and social perspectives on learning, reflection may also be understood and enacted differently” (p.

2). The researcher believes that reflection evolves over time, and is reapplied to the sojourner's life experiences, iteratively, and for years after the study abroad experience itself.

Relevant Literature

Krsmanovic's (2021) recent literature review of empirical research on international student services surmised that this work would act in providing deeper and systematic insights into the prior research in this area . . . necessary for the work of higher education institutions, faculty, and student affairs professionals tasked with supporting this student population and aiming to enhance their cultural, social, and academic experiences. (p. 3)

On U.S. college and university campuses, support for transnational study is typically divided between two offices: the international student advising office which provides support to the incoming sojourners and the study abroad advising offices which provides support to the outgoing sojourners. It is there that some groundwork has been laid to examine the long-term impacts of the international study experience; however, it has been largely studied through the lens of westerners traveling abroad for short-term programs (Brown, 2009; Paige et al., 2009; Walters et al., 2017).

There is scant research about the concept of self and identity in the transformational experience of the sojourner traveling internationally to study. More specifically lacking is literature discussing the impact of the experience in an international setting (outside of the U.S.) after students graduate. Brown (2009) and Paige, et al. (2009) both found that the international student experience does have long-term implications but there is still little known about how participants of study abroad

continue to incorporate the impacts of their experience throughout their life. In a study examining Chinese and Vietnamese student experiences in Australia, Tran (2013) found that the experience of studying transnationally is a “springboard for the emergence of the newly constructed self” (p. 137). Documenting and analyzing the long-term impacts on the international student’s concept of self-identity will inform international education professionals who are challenged in “how to capture and support the learning processes that occur through international experiences” (Arthur et al., 2020, p. 2).

Providing support to international students aimed only at on-campus success meets a primary need but implementing further services that introduce skills which promote intentional reflection and meaning-making will foster learning well beyond the on-campus experience. Barton and Ryan (2020) proposed that “in order to make and connect meanings in their specific learning contexts, international students can be explicitly taught how to reflect” (p. 3). Providing students with the opportunity to consider how they might intentionally and actively make meaning of their experience, and to do so while they are still engaged in the action of studying abroad itself, creates avenues for practitioners to educate and prepare students for navigating after they return home.

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary international education literature agrees that international study stimulates transformation even when contextual variables exist (Arthur et al., 2020; Aydin, 2012; Brown, 2009; Nada et al., 2018; Perry et al., 2012; Walters et al., 2017). Brown (2009) found that the “international sojourn has the power to effect a growth in intercultural competence, as well as a shift in self-understanding, with long-term

implications for personal and professional life” (p. 517). Brown also posited that time away from one’s culture and home create a challenge that when overcome, paves the way for transformation. Nada et al. (2018) noted that in a study where Portuguese students who studied abroad were prompted to engage in narrative reflection, traits of transformative learning were almost always evident in participant responses, even when not explicitly articulated.

Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (1991) provided the theoretical framework for this study. Using a grounded theory approach, Mezirow developed 10 phases that lead to a transformative process (Mezirow, 1991). The first phase, a “disorienting dilemma” and the last phase, “a reintegration into one’s life” paralleled the bookending phases of the initial and re-entry culture shock (Oberg, 1960) of a study abroad experience. Mezirow’s 10 phases to transformation are:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective. (Mezirow, 1991)

Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning posited that one's experience and background shape their reflective lens and that only through a catalyst (i.e., a disorienting dilemma) can meaning perspectives, habits, and frames of references be transformed. Though scholarly debate continues to expand from Mezirow's groundwork, its initial form serves as the foundational basis for this study.

The study was also informed by Dewey's (1933) definition of reflection and Illeris' (2014) work connecting identity to transformative learning to explore three conceptual threads: *reflective application, making meaning, and negotiating one's identity*.

Reflective Application

As individuals continue to reflect on their study abroad event, they reimagine it in accord with their lived experiences. In doing so, reflection is applied to their current circumstances and the original experience takes on new meaning. According to Mezirow, (1991) "we imaginatively reconstruct an earlier meaning by the same process of projection, interpreting what we know in the new and unfamiliar situational context" (p. 29). Therefore, reflective application of study abroad should be a continually evolving activity that extends well beyond the initial experience.

Making Meaning

John Dewey's (1933) seminal work on reflection informed Mezirow's work on meaning-making. Reflection as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supported form of knowledge in the light of ground that supports it and the

further conclusion to which it ends” (p. 9) is the definition by which transformative learning through reflection occurs. Using this foundation, meaning-making of a study abroad experience occurs through what Mezirow (1991) calls “premise reflection--a fault-finding review of presuppositions from prior learning and their consequences” (p. 102). This reflection has the power to transform when previously determined assumptions become challenged.

Identity

Early in his scholarship, Knud Illeris (2004) began attempting to modernize Mezirow’s initial work by rethinking what is meant by *learning*. Departing from previous psychological work on self, he expanded the concept of personality change tying it directly to the concept of learning. Ultimately, Illeris theorized that learning should be a side effect of change in self and that acquisition of knowledge does not occur outside of a delta within one’s self. More recently, Illeris (2014) endeavored to redefine transformative learning by understanding what the ultimate intended outcome is. In doing so, he proposed that transformative learning and identity are synonymous.

Hajo et al. (2018) recently explored the connection between living abroad and themes of self-concept clarity. Their research “suggests that going far from home can lead one closer to the self, with implications for significant life decisions” (p. 16). Specifically, the studies indicated that reflecting on time abroad, provided more insight for self-discretion than reflection on time spent at home.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do Omani nationals who graduated from U.S. universities reflectively apply that experience in their daily lives?
2. In what ways do Omanis believe their international study experience influences their identity?
3. How do Omanis continue to make meaning of their study abroad experience?

Methods

A qualitative study underpinned by a phenomenological approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was implemented to carry out a case study with Omani nationals who studied abroad in the United States, graduated with a degree, and returned home. Incorporating a phenomenological approach served to assist the researcher in her goal of examining and describing the lived experience (Seidman, 2019) of the participants in the study.

Setting

Data collection occurred on-site to familiarize the researcher with the setting (Seidman, 2019). The researcher traveled to Muscat, the cosmopolitan capital of the Sultanate of Oman to conduct the study. The city is the largest populated area in the country where most citizens find employment and establish their residence. Due to challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher also used Zoom to implement some data collection.

Participants

Purposeful sampling (Seidman, 2019) was used to recruit a variety of

participants. Sixteen Omani citizens (see Figure 3) who earned degrees at various universities and colleges in the United States were recruited for the case study. Participants who graduated within the last five years through those who graduated 20 or more years ago were recruited to aim for maximum variation (Seidman, 2019) in the sample.

Figure 3

Demographic Information of Participants in the Study

Interviews	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	F	1997	Undergraduate	Graphic Design
	M	1998	Undergraduate	Computer Science
	M	2008	Graduate	Petroleum Engineering
	F	2014	Graduate	Mass Communication
	F	2015	Undergraduate	Finance/International Business
	M	2017	Undergraduate	Communication
	F	2018	Undergraduate	Chemical Engineering/Mathematics
Male Focus Group	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	M	2005	Undergraduate	Information Sciences
	M	2010	Undergraduate	Business
	M	2014	Undergraduate	Civil & Environmental Engineering
	M	2019	Undergraduate	Business
Female Focus Group	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	F	2003	Undergraduate	Nursing
	F	2012	Graduate	Computer Information Systems
	F	2017	Graduate	Brand Management
	F	2017	Undergraduate	Software Engineering
Oral History Interview	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Graduation</i>	<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>Major</i>
	M	2012	Doctoral	Organizational Communication

Note. This figure shows the breakdown of participants in each data collection by gender, graduation date, and major.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Three data collection procedures were used to inform this research. First, three semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2019) were implemented to explore “the meaning of people’s experiences in the context of their lives” (p. 21). Secondly, two focus groups were implemented to understand what Omanis who studied abroad

think about their experience (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Finally, a one-hour personal narrative interview (Mertens, 2020) was implemented via oral storytelling. The use of three different data collection methods was a “strategy for obtaining consistent and reliable data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 252) to support methods triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews

Seven Omanis participated in three separate semi-structured (Seidman, 2019) interviews with the researcher. Using the semi-structured (Seidman, 2019) format allowed the researcher to pivot and remain flexible during the interview as the conversation ebbed and flowed. The three-interview approach (Seidman, 2019) allowed the researcher to follow a sequence that allowed “the interviewer and participant to explore the participant’s experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning (Seidman, 2019, p. 21). The interviews occurred both via zoom and in-person in the public co-working space in Oman.

Focus Groups

The second data collection method used was single category focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Two focus groups with four participants each (see Appendix E) were administered in both the public coworking meeting space and via Zoom. To support respect for local cultural expectations (Krueger & Casey, 2015) focus groups were separated by gender.

The researcher was challenged in finding an agreed upon time for the women's focus group to meet while she was in Oman. Upon departing, the researcher communicated with the participants of the women's focus group that it

would occur electronically, via Zoom, soon after her return to the United States. However, identifying a time where the four participants could all meet simultaneously proved unsuccessful. Consequently, four one-hour interviews were held with each participant of the women's focus group using select questions culled from the interview and focus group protocol.

Oral History Interview

The final data collection method was an in-depth, personal narrative interview using oral history telling (Mertens, 2020). An Omani that participated in neither the interviews nor the focus groups was selected to meet with the researcher using Zoom software after her time in Oman. The participant was asked to narrate their experience of study abroad (see Appendix D). The interviewee was given no time limit, nor further prompt. This was done to further spur his own memory to further explore how he considers his study abroad experience within the context of his current lived experiences (Mertens, 2020).

Data Analysis

The researcher implemented Mertens (2020) three step process of data analysis to support the inductive analysis process (Seidman, 2019). The three steps outlined by Mertens (2020) are:

1. Prepare the data.
2. Explore the data.
3. Reduce the data.

The researcher prepared the data by establishing an anonymized and secure electronic filing system. Each interview, the focus group, and the oral history telling

interview were digitally recorded, transcribed, and stored in the electronic filing system creating a repository for the data. The researcher thoroughly read each transcript to familiarize herself with the text. Then the researcher re-read each transcript to line-number (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and established preliminary codes. Member checks (Seidman, 2019) were implemented among a random selection of participants in addition to select passages that the researcher deemed necessary.

Next, the researcher explored the data by consolidating initial codes and identifying emerging themes and patterns. This allowed for identifying further opportunities to reduce the data and construct categorical themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher conducted coding, annotated notes, and highlighting electronically in the transcripts stored in the OneDrive within NVIVO, a qualitative research analysis software system. Finally, the researcher reduced the data and formalized categories that captured the themes which had emerged. The researcher reviewed the newly created and established thematic categories as she started deriving meaning and application from the data. The researcher also identified and recorded concepts that emerged from the data which “identify what themes cut across the questions” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 155).

The researcher implemented an additional layer of analysis for the focus group and oral history data. Krueger & Casey (2015) recommend making notes during the focus groups that speak to the environment during the data collection. This differed from Seidman’s (2019) advice to separate the interview data collection from analysis. The researcher incorporated Krueger and Casey’s (2015) suggestion during the focus

groups. The researcher recorded voice notes using Otter.ai transcription application to quickly document field notes which were later typed in the data repository.

A systematic approach to analysis was implemented for all gathered data. Substantial planning and implementation occurred well before in-country research, including the dissemination of informed consent forms (see Appendices F and G). Debriefing, organizing, and coding typically commenced immediately after data collection while the researcher was still in Oman. Consistency of analysis was a goal across all points of data collection (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Findings

Guided by the research questions, the researcher organized the findings into broad groupings which correlated to Mezirow's (1991) 10 phases of transformation. From there, the researcher identified four major themes which emerged and spoke to the three conceptual threads: reflective application, making meaning, and negotiating identity. The four persistent themes that emerged were *persistent active reflection*, *advocating for the experience*, *broadened personal connections*, and *consideration of self-identity*.

Persistent Active Reflection

The word *remember* appeared 173 times across all data collection methods. Each participant in this study said they continue to think about their study abroad experience regardless of the time passed since they left the United States. A participant in the men's focus group stated, "in June, I will have completed 10 years of work experience. So, 10 years after graduation, I still think about the U.S. as if this 10 years of work experience is nothing special." This participant went on to tell a story about meeting a coworker soon after returning from studying abroad. The coworker was retiring and upon hearing that

this participant had just returned from the U.S. admitted that they still missed the U.S. after studying abroad there 40 years prior. “I thought that in a long time, I will forget but he was right. But ask me again when I retire.”

Positive Memories

Another participant in the men’s focus group referred to the small city where he studied in the United States as his home away from home and said he still talks about the experience with his friends and family. He noted “because of that experience, we just have to share it.” In the women's focus group, one study participant who left to study at a northeastern private university for her master’s degree just seven months after delivering her second child, discussed how five years after graduation, she is still so enamored with her experience in the U.S. that at her most recent birthday party, her family gave her a birthday cake with an American flag on it.

Negative Memories

Not all memories activate positive reflection; difficult experiences also bring forth reflection but in complicated ways. An interview participant who graduated from a private institution on the east coast over 20 years ago shared an incident she has never forgotten. As an undergraduate student, she took an art class when one day she came to class and discovered that the model was a nude male. To that date, she had not seen someone of the opposite gender nude, even in pictures. “Until today, I feel really upset about it. So as a Muslim, you can imagine how traumatized I was by that experience. There was no consideration from the teacher.”

Many participants expressed how challenging and difficult it was to be away from their family when life events happened. Several participants missed sibling’s weddings

and birthdays, but it was the difficult events that seemed far more upsetting to have been on another continent. An interview participant who graduated five years ago from a large public institution in the south found out how his grandfather had died via text while he was in class. Another participant who graduated from a mid-western university over 20 years ago said that there were very few times he felt sad:

unless sometimes you know, you feel sad if one of your family maybe dies. It happened to me once. One of my cousins who was very close to me. I was disappointed that I cannot leave class and cannot leave university to go back home.

Each participant indicated participating in on-going reflection about their experience abroad either through memories of personal experiences, interesting stories, or challenging situations.

A participant in the women's focus group recalled a negative memory of being bullied by one of her professors as an undergraduate. Though this remains an unpleasant memory upon which to reflect about her study abroad experience, she says she thinks of it differently now because she talks to her own daughter about how to properly respond to such experiences. "Even though I didn't get it from my parents, for me, I feel like maybe it happened because I need to let my daughter know about it."

Advocating for the Experience

Every participant discussed how the impact of the study abroad experience led them to encourage others in their lives to do the same. From family members and friends and to colleagues, each study participant spoke about how they either directly, or

indirectly, had championed others to experience studying abroad. In doing so, many of the participants attributed this practice to their way of deriving meaning from it.

Active Encouragement

The participants spoke frequently about their intentional advocacy for the experience within their spheres of influence. A women's focus group participant who graduated in 2012 said that she not only encourages her family to consider studying abroad, but also the family of her friends. "I have friends who are really older than me, and they have their kids going to further education and they are always referring back to me."

Another participant in the women's focus group described how she is actively trying to convince her daughter to study abroad after her high school graduation. A third participant in the group decided to send her children to international schools in Oman to foster her support for studying abroad early. At the time of the interview, she was also trying to convince her niece to study in the U.S. "I would advise anyone, anyone who asked me, I always tell them to go." The fourth participant in the women's focus group said she convinced close friends in Oman to study abroad.

An interview participant who graduated over 20 years ago continues to advocate for the experience for his children. "I always even tell my kids now I want you to go there, you know, have this experience." He is also advocating for the experience in his professional career as an educator in Oman. He recalled a recent story where a student came to him to discuss their academic future and he encouraged the student to study in the U.S. even though the student was keen on studying in an Arabic-speaking country. A woman who graduated seven years ago and is considering studying in the U.S. again for

her graduate education said she discusses the added value of study abroad with those who ask her about her experience. “You know, go for it. I think this is the time you know, if you’re gonna change to something better than that’s the time.”

Passive Encouragement

Sometimes the participants’ advocacy of the experience does not happen intentionally. An interview participant who graduated from a midwestern university in 1998 was the first of his family to go abroad. He explained that it took some effort to get his parents to support his wish to study abroad. “It was not easy because I was the first one from my, you know, I also come from a village outside Muscat. So it was not common for people to go abroad and study.” However, upon returning after graduation, he stated “many of my family members also decided to go abroad” after observing both his academic and personal development.

A participant in the men's focus group said that his youngest brother did not have a desire to go abroad before seeing him do so. “My youngest brother didn’t have that as a dream...to go to the U.S. For him, seeing me go for the experience and come back as a changed man, he decided to have that experience.” Upon hearing this, another participant responded by discussing his own siblings, “my brother also wanted to study abroad by looking at his older brother. I think that it is not whether you discuss or recommend. It’s how they see you.” A participant in the women's focus group found that her younger sister was interested in studying abroad after the participant returned home. “So, without even saying it, I was encouraging her.”

Whether the advocacy and encouragement of study abroad within the participant’s spheres of influence was expressed as active or passive, the sentiment remained

consistent among all the participants. A way in which they continue to make meaning of their time studying abroad is to encourage others to do so. An interview participant who graduated with her master's degree in 2014 summed it up eloquently when saying she encourages others to study abroad because she hopes "to be a role model to other Omani ladies to add value to their lives."

Broadened Personal Connections

The word *different* occurred 285 times across all the transcripts. Every participant discussed that one of their favorite things about studying abroad was the opportunity to meet new people with different backgrounds. The participants in the men's focus group all concurred that meeting people of other cultures was one of their most enjoyable memories from the experience. After each participant answered this way, the last one stated, "I agree with them. I'd say the thing that I enjoyed most about studying abroad is having the chance to meet people from different cultures."

Challenging Convictions

The participants in this study expressed how their experience of getting to meet, study, and work among people with different backgrounds than their own was more impactful than just the intrigue of meeting others. As one of the women's focus group participants said, "I think when you get your perspective widened, there is no way it gets to shrink again because you've already helped to get a bigger view."

One participant in the men's focus group discussed how he went to public school in Oman, so he had mostly only studied alongside other Omanis. In doing so, he said "we all have differences here, but in the general sense, we will look at the same thing thinking the same way." When he was studying abroad and meeting people with

different backgrounds than his own, he found the experience to induce “push and pull feelings. You want to hate or love. You struggle inside. Is this acceptable or not?

Because it’s something against your religion or your culture.”

A participant in the women's focus group remarked on how prior to studying abroad she had a “limit range” on the difference within people that she would accept. But after studying abroad and “actually meeting people, and like talking to them, there was a kind of change in me of like seeing different things, different perspectives.” An interview participant noted that after meeting people from different cultures, he noted the experience “changed a lot of my, of my own lifestyle, to accept people and to respect others.”

The experience of meeting and then studying, living, and working with others also showed impact on the cultural and ethical beliefs among some of the participants. One participant recalled a story of being told by a friend that the soda machine in the residence hall was broken and that for the price of one, he could get three cans of soda. The participant remembered rushing to the vending machine, and upon learning the information was correct, bought three cans for the price of one many times, so much so that he made a makeshift basket out of his shirt to carry them back to his room. Upon entering his room, his roommate told him that this was unethical, something the participant had not considered. He still uses this story to discuss ethics in his college business lectures today to debate ethical dilemmas. An interview participant laughed when she recalled her different opinions after graduation:

I don’t know. I feel like I had certain convictions that I let go of. I feel like I became a lot more chill as a person. A lot more receptive. But having met so

many people, different people, and like, obviously studying abroad, I realized I can't take anything for granted. To study abroad, for me, it really humbles you to be around the world with so many different people, and then come back to your original country and reflect.

An interview participant who graduated 5 years ago and is now one of the first women to work on oil rigs in the desert as a chemical engineer credits her ability to work successfully among mostly men to her study abroad experience in the U.S. She expressed that she did not believe she would have been as participatory in work discussion with her male colleagues if she had not studied in the U.S. "That willingness to interact with others and be part of the team. I give credit to me being exposed to so many other cultures in America."

Life-long Connections

Many of the participants remarked that the social connections they made while studying abroad remain today. A participant in the women's focus group found her experience abroad to be far more beneficial once she started making friends with her classmates. At first, she was too shy to approach American classmates but once she started those conversations, she found several friends with whom she's still "in contact until today. We're still really good friends." Another interview participant who graduated in 1995 stated "I have friends from all over the world now. Even my friends from the U.S. Some of them are still in touch with me."

A participant in the men's focus group recalled his first days on his large, southwestern public university campus where he met other students who noticed he appeared lost. "They took me by the hand, and they showed me around and then we

keep in contact until now.” He also discussed how he met a woman in the U.S. who was Christian, and he now calls her his “American adoptive mother.” He joked that when they would make plans, she would ask him if he was showing up on “American time” or “Omani time”. This kind of culture sharing was new for him, and he felt it taught him to accept others “the way they are” even though you don’t see everything “eye to eye.”

Ultimately, the opportunity to meet people of different backgrounds provided opportunities for Omanis to reconsider their own frames of reference (Mezirow, 2009) as well as expand their personal and professional networks. A participant in the men's focus group put it best when he said “Now, how I view it is whenever I see something that is different, I don’t try to push my own opinion on them, but I try to understand the other person, how they view this, how they understand it.” He stated he has found this very beneficial in his professional life because “We spend half our days at work. So half our life is working. And you have different people from different cultures there.” He believes the way he now tries to understand others’ points of view “shows them how you accept them.” The participant paused. Then said that “more than a few times,” his friends and colleagues have said he was different. “I don’t understand what they mean, but I can feel that maybe my experience studying in a different culture is showing in my work and when they say ‘different’, they mean it in a positive way.”

Considering their Self-Identity

The participants often discussed how they believed studying abroad altered how they think of themselves. Many participants stated they believed they experienced positive personal transformations and discussed how they reconsidered their own identities within the context of their nationality and citizenship. One interview

participant noted, “Obviously we do self-reflection even before I went to the U.S., but the fact that you are away from all like the social commitments and you know, your usual comfort zones helps you rethink your life, rethink your priorities. So, it has definitely changed the person I was.”

Returned Better

Many of the participants expressed that they believe the experience of studying abroad changed them for the better. An interview participant said the experience not only helped her mature but also helped her to become more “structured, proactive, and patient.” Another interview participant credits her ability to be confident in her abilities to speak up at work to her experience studying abroad. “I just feel more confident, and I do not shy away or avoid any kind of confrontation.” She also stated that the experience taught her to be independent and “responsible for me.”

One participant who studied abroad in her late 20s to obtain her master’s degree believed her personality was altered dramatically. “I was a very shy, fragile person, and that person has changed completely. I left that person in Oman and returned back home a totally different person. I came home a much better, stronger person because of this experience.” A participant in the men's focus group noted that he also used to be a shy person and that in the U.S. he found he had to be more outgoing to truly benefit from the experience, so he put himself “upfront, just to overcome that.”

A Sense of Dual Identities

One common theme was that the experience resulted in the participants considering themselves both Omani and American. In one sense, the experience reinforced their sense of pride and connection to being from Oman. Many were

confronted with the reality that their American classmates often had not heard of Oman prior to meeting them. A participant in the women's focus group recalled how after she told her classmate where Oman was, they asked if Oman had a president and she said, “no, a Sultan”, they responded with “like, jazz men” in reference to the popular song of the time, *Sultans of Swing*. Many of the participants took part in on-campus culture sharing or started Omani student organizations to showcase the country to their university community. An interview participant said, “I feel proud of representing my country to a large university outside the country.” They also found that this was a way to dispel misunderstandings and stereotypes.

But even more so, the participants felt more appreciative of Oman in a way. One of the participants in the men's focus group said “when you are in your own country, you don’t think about it, but then you separate, and it really pulls you back. Oman grew stronger to me when I was there.” Another focus group member said he still has a stronger sense of pride in Oman 10 years after returning. During a recent national holiday celebration, he insisted that his family make plans to celebrate and watch fireworks but found his family’s enthusiasm less than his. An interview participant who graduated from undergrad five years ago found that he did not appreciate Oman as much as he does now since he studied abroad. When he was on campus, he said he finally understood “how amazing Oman is, how amazing my family is, how beautiful everything there is.”

Alternatively, the participants also discussed a new American sensibility. Several of them said that their friends and family have even given them nicknames because of it. An interview participant said his siblings call him “the American boy” now. During the

men's focus group, they all agreed that they have been told by people in their lives that they are “acting American”. When asked if they thought this was negative, the men in the focus group did not. However, an interview participant who graduated in the late 90s, said that she has sometimes found it challenging at work when her coworkers make comments about her “American ways of doing things.” Similarly, an interview participant who graduated recently said she has had similar encounters and while she does not believe it is confrontational, she is not completely certain that is not without some unspoken intention. She however sees it as an opportunity to dispel stereotypes about American culture.

A participant in the men’s focus group tried to explain his continued sense of connection to the U.S. when he stated that he refers to it as his home away from home especially because “almost seven years later, I have parts of me still in that place.” The same sentiment was expressed by a participant in the women’s focus group when she said her coworker will “make the comment and be like, ‘you’re so American.’ Like yeah, but I like it. I mean, I lived in the U.S. it's my second home.”

Closer to Self

Every participant referred to being who they are today because of the experience. One interview participant said if she had not studied abroad, she would not have met and married the person she did. “Our marriage is very modern for Oman.” The same sentiment was conveyed by another interview participant who said she married a man of her choosing as opposed to accepting an arranged marriage. “My husband comes from a very different background than I come from, but we were both western educated, so we made the decision to get married ourselves.” One participant chose to not wear the hijab

after studying abroad. Though she admits that she was already considering this choice prior to studying abroad, she believes the experience in the U.S. confirmed her thoughts.

Another interview participant credits study abroad for the “majority of my personality” which she believes was “shaped during those four years.” Though most participants agreed that it is challenging to specifically elaborate upon what is different, all said they were changed. During the oral history interview, the participant explained that “the power of experiencing going abroad is not about education.” He went on to describe the variety of methods by which one can learn virtually from wherever they are in the world but then said, “Education is that it is the interaction, it is about that social capital that really redefined how we make sense of our own world and the words of others.” In response to a question about how the experience impacted him, an interview participant who graduated almost 30 years ago responded, “I came back different” while the interview participant who graduated most recently said “I am totally, 100% not the same person.”

Summary

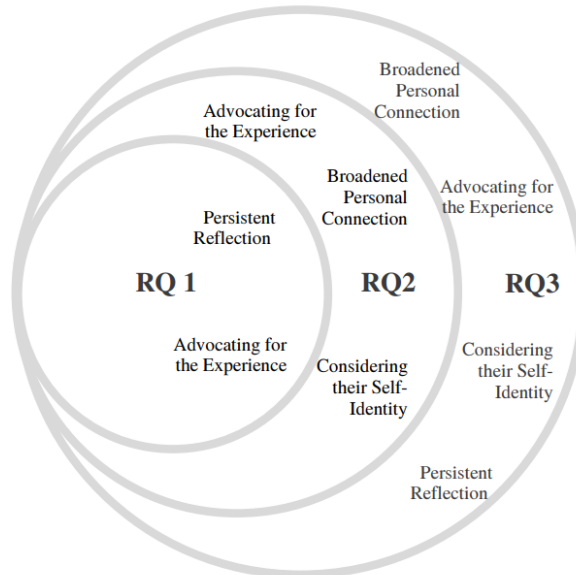
Each of the participants overwhelmingly agree that they believe their time spent studying abroad was a transformative experience for them. They conveyed applying the experience in their daily lives through active, on-going reflection of their time in the United States. In some cases, that reflection has led to redefining negative memories into opportunities to teach others in their lives. Positive memories and reflection remain top of mind for many of the participants who remarked they still seek avenues for discussing their experience with others in their lives. The participants all spoke to believing that the experience shaped how they view themselves and contemplate their identity in their

current lived experiences. In most participant’s concept of self, they believe they returned to Oman a changed person in a positive manner as well as in a way that still impacts their lives. Finally, they continue to make meaning of their study abroad experience by advocating for the experience to their communities and loved ones and retaining certain elements of behavior or personal convictions they arrived at while in the U.S. Not all four themes specifically respond to an individual research question but rather some themes may respond to one and some may respond to all. Figure 4 shows how the themes build off one another from research question one to research question three so that ultimately all four themes answered the questions.

Figure 4

Thematic Correlation to Research Questions

Research Question One (RQ 1): How do Omanis who graduated from U.S. universities reflectively apply that experience in their daily lives?
 Research Question Two (RQ2): In what ways do Omanis believe their international study experience influences their identity?
 Research Question Three (RQ3): How do Omanis continue to make meaning of their study abroad experience?



Note. This figure demonstrates how the four themes brought forth from the study correlate to the research questions.

Discussion

The first research question addressed how the participants reflectively apply their study abroad experience in their daily lives. John Dewey's (1933) research theorized that reflection is fundamental to thinking, and ultimately, learning. He further posited that it does not happen simply by prompted response but also in social and behavioral exercise. Dewey's theory also proposed that learning does not happen by chance. "Thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; it doesn't not appear just on 'general principles.' There is something specific with occasions and provokes it" (p. 12). This idea that an act or an occasion sparks transformation predicated Mezirow's (1990) later theory defining this act as the disorienting dilemma.

The application of reflection creates an opportunity to negotiate the original meaning derived from the experience and to then apply new meaning given one's current reality or lived experience. All participants in this study persistently reflect upon their study abroad experience regardless of how long ago they completed their programs. Just as the participants in a study by DeGraaf et al. (2013), which examined the long-term effects of education abroad, these participants remarked that they continue to talk about and think about the experience almost daily. Though not all reflections are positive, they do demonstrate a practice leading to learning (Dewey, 1993; Mezirow, 1990).

The second research question addressed in what ways Omanis believe study abroad impacted their identity. Once someone has engaged in reflective inquiry, what is the consequence of transformation? Illeris (2014) wrote, "when transformative learning is defined in relation to identity, it becomes possible to establish a direct connection to the current conditions and frames of society that create both the growing need for and

the conditions of the transforming processes” (p. 153). Thus, identity negotiation is not simply attributed to a transformative event, but rather it is the intended outcome. When sojourners do the work of meaning-making, their concept of self-identity will be intrinsically examined, and ultimately changed. As an interview participant stated, the experience “weirdly made me appreciate my own self.”

Participants found that studying abroad in the United States both brought them closer to their Omani nationality and instilled in them a sense of Americanism that upon returning fostered a sort of dual identity. The experience allowed for an opportunity to renegotiate their own concept of self-identity within the context of national identity in the same way that the students in Dolby’s 2004 study of Americans returning from studying in Australia reported. In his examination of Turkish scholars upon their return after studying abroad, Karakas (2020) observed participants noting new formed ways of thought. They brought with them a preference for a more cosmopolitan way of thought and predilection “to embrace a transnational perspective upon their return from study abroad to adjust into social, cultural, and academic environments at home by reconstructing their perceptions of the home through the lenses of their transnational(ized) identity” (p. 257). Brown (2009) also found that individuals who studied abroad began to reexamine their world views and beliefs after the experience and through discourse, brought forth different meanings. “This requires the sojourner to look at their world from a different point of view, which is often in conflict with personal values and beliefs: when they have an experience that cannot be assimilated into their original meaning perspective, the experience is rejected or the perspective changes to accommodate the new experience” (p. 508).

The third, and last, research question addressed how the participants make meaning of the experience. Kortegast and Boisfontaine (2015) found students who studied abroad consistently expressed a keen desire to discuss their experiences with classmates, friends, and family. Their study determined that providing opportunities for intentional reflection and discussion created substantial space for meaning discovery. In examining how study abroad participants make meaning after their experience, participants in this study appear to be altruistically making meaning of their experiences by encouraging others in their lives to consider studying abroad themselves.

The DeGraaf et al. (2013) study also found that individuals who had studied abroad were more likely to incorporate their international experiences into their daily lives through their personal relationships, not only during the experience itself but also well after. Participants in the study repeatedly expressed the same sentiment to “demonstrate that a semester abroad does influence peer-to-peer relationships positively, and that those relationships play an important role in students’ experiences while abroad and after returning home” (p. 54). This is occurring both intentionally and unintentionally. Participants intentionally encourage study abroad by speaking directly with those to whom they want to advocate the experience, while they are unintentionally encouraging the experience when those within their spheres of influence witness the participants returning home having transformed.

As Hendershot and Sperandio (2009) found, participants all noted that diversifying their personal networks remained one of their most valued experiences while studying abroad. Much like the students in Karakas’ (2020) study, participants found this expansion supported an equal diversification of thought and consideration for

participants but also continued to impact their daily lived experience living and working in a cosmopolitan society. DiFrancesco et al. (2019) investigated the impact of study abroad by applying it to work on “self” by examining the impact of short-term, week-long study abroad. The outcomes showed that a:

new identity could be formed as a result of students’ experiences as that of openness and willingness to work with other cultures and this could be explored further in future research due to how mentions of more identification were found after study abroad experiences. (p. 26)

Those networks often transcend the college and campus experience remaining intact for years after leaving the U.S. This further demonstrates the enduring impacts of the experience congruent with a 2019 study by Okken et al., in which 17 Dutch teachers who had studied abroad during their teaching internships found that the impact of such an experience remained long after the experience itself. Okken’s study expanded on a previous study by Dolby (2004) which found that study abroad “not only provides the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself” (p. 150).

Implications

This study revealed that when international students leave their study abroad location and return home, the experience not only remains with them, but they also continue to revisit the experience and derive shifting meanings from it which inform their concept of self-identity. As international educators examine their work in a context that moves beyond on-campus activity, attention must be given to the meaning that is made by students regarding their experiences abroad (Brown, 2009; Tran, 2013; Walters, 2017). The study is significant because it examined the experience through the lens of an

historically unexamined population in international education literature. By doing so from outside the western-lens of U.S. students going abroad, the study provides a springboard for further investigation, thus compelling the larger international community to not only contribute to, but also widen the inquiry within the international education scholarship.

This research contributes to the professional development of both international education and study abroad practitioner areas which currently lack substantive findings on the meaning-making that occurs after participants complete their program and return home. While understanding the implications of the on-campus experience that occurs during the study abroad program is of vital importance, further documenting the significant impact of that experience more broadly reinforces the need for comprehensive support of transnational education. In the modern era of international student and study abroad advising, attention to professional practice must expand beyond the historically decentralized scope of transactional advising. This study provides evidence that can be parlayed into practical application by incorporating educational tools that support and foster critical reflection and meaning-making which aid in the development of life-long learning.

International education practitioners will understand the value of incorporating services that also support the development of critical reflection skills as these will better prepare students for their identity development post-study abroad. “Considering reflection for and with international students has the potential for their domestic counterparts, higher education staff and others to further understand what international students may face during their time as a student overseas (Barton & Ryan, 2020, p. 12).

Lastly, the results of this study can help international student and study abroad advisors reshape and rethink their own motivation in their professional roles by underpinning their work as the precipice of learning for students beyond the classroom experience.

This study focused on only one country of origin of participants and limited study abroad destination to the United States. Further implications for the long-term impact of studying abroad could be explored both by recruiting participants from multiple countries and seeking individuals who studied abroad in places other than the U.S. Additionally, other encounters such as those relating directly to the experiences of culture and re-entry shock could be examined to connect them directly to the Mezirow's (1991) ten phases of transformative learning to investigate additional long-term implications of studying abroad.

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SECTION SIX:

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

The process of writing the dissertation was incredibly rewarding and beneficial, but not without significant challenge and disruption. Inspired by both the practical and theoretical approach of transformative and authentic leadership (Northouse, 2019), I was eager to engage in dissertation research that would not only provide me with an opportunity to partake in scholarly inquiry but would also be beneficial to the study participants. I was hopeful that the process would cement my long-standing beliefs and convictions in the intended outcomes of international education and exchange as a conduit to cross cultural understanding and respect that transcends boundaries and borders. Lastly, I anticipated that the process would substantially influence my leadership style and philosophy with a new lens and focus towards leading with scholarly experience and impact. What I did not anticipate was that the very process of transformative learning I was examining in the research would be parallel the process I experienced when writing the dissertation.

The Dissertation Influence on Educational Leadership

I can confidently say that this process has exceeded all my hopes and expectations. This dissertation has largely influenced my practice as a leader in international education in two ways. First, it has proven to me that the work of international student advising is much more than transactional immigration advising. Secondly, it has also shown me that as a leader in the field, it is both my duty and my obligation to ensure that those who I lead understand the wider impact of the work they do.

More than Immigration Advising

My entire professional journey has been in international education. More specifically, I have spent my career working directly with international students studying abroad in the United States. Before I held leadership and management positions, I was an international student advisor where the foundation for my professional activities was built upon the day-to-day immigration compliance work that international student practitioners must perform. Though this work is not the impetus for satisfaction and gratification in the field, it is a necessary component to continue working in it. Many international student advisors, like myself, understand that though this part of the job may not be their favorite, their direct work with international students is. The dissertation process has shown that international student advising is an adult learning practice that often serves “more than one purpose” (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013, p. 44).

This dissertation study has also demonstrated that the work beyond technical compliance is not just enjoyable, but it is also necessary in terms of discovering and understanding what services can be provided to students that lead to learning outcomes of the adult learners (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In my role as both a practitioner and a leader, and now after my experience writing this dissertation, I am committed to incorporating scholarly evidence in onboarding, training, and professional development. The inclusion and advocacy of knowledge-generated inquiry (Schultz, 2010) as a matter of practice and intentional design will also show international educators, both those I lead and myself, that the work we do is more than transactional advising. It will also demonstrate and set examples for further inquiry and provide avenues for others to engage in their own scholarship.

Wider Impact

As a leader of a team, it is my job to foster a team that cohesively understands the common and altruistic goals of the work (Levi, 2017). I often consider the implications for emerging best practices and trends in the international education field and how they impact the students after they graduate and become active participants in their citizenry, in their home countries, here in the United States, and the rest of the world. I want those I lead to also recognize, acknowledge, and understand the bigger picture. It is a lofty goal but one that has been continually supported through the readings that discuss the role of scholarly practice and research. As Shultz (2010) wrote, “Inquiry guided by critical thought can level existing asymmetrical relations of power, culture, and equity in schools” (p. 53). Guiding that inquiry with proven scholarship and data is critical given the possible outcomes of the research.

The work that culminated in this dissertation study, I witnessed that consideration evolve into evidence. As a leader, the documentation of this evidence through scholarly inquiry legitimized my professional drive and desire to advocate for international education. International student advising offices are often viewed as processing offices that simply provide paperwork and compliant advising and therefore often overlooked as transformative entities in the student life cycle on campus. This research demonstrated that the work of the international education practitioner can have life-long impacts and that there are far more meaningful outcomes of the work than just transactional advice. This evidence further supported understanding of myself as an authentic leader who is “inspired and intrinsically motivated” (Northouse, 2019, p. 199) with a passion for the work.

As a leader who strives to have “research skills that can be used as tools to better understand and to improve problems” (J.A. Perry, 2016, p. 303), I now know that I can lean into scholarship to foster agency as I work to advocate for resources, value, and voice for the departments and units that I manage and lead (Levi, 2017). It will be critical in my role as a senior international officer to directly point to evidence-based information that shows the direct impact that our work has on student engagement at the university and beyond.

The Dissertation Influence on Scholarship

The dissertation writing process upheld my understanding that learning is life-long and there is no expiration on the ability to transform. Much like the participants in this study, I have found the experience of writing this dissertation to be a transformative learning experience. Before engaging in the process, I was challenged in understanding how scholarly inquiry was relevant or impactful in the practitioner’s scope of responsibilities. I now have experience that taught me how scholarly inquiry not only informs practice but also drives it. Moreover, the process of writing this dissertation has confirmed my desire to be a change agent in my profession (J.A. Perry, 2016, Ettlting, 2012).

The process has also shown me that learning need not simply be a preamble to one’s professional life and career. J.A. Perry (2016) noted that doctoral level studies in education often attract mid-career level professionals. Additionally, transformative, and authentic leadership (Northouse, 2019) requires an intentional and continual education. This is overtly stated by George et al. (2011) who stated, “developing authentic leadership requires a commitment to developing yourself” (p. 165). One can engage in

learning at any stage in their career, even squarely in the middle. Before writing the dissertation, I was unsure of my academic abilities to the point of underestimating my capacity to finish the process. However, having completed a doctoral dissertation, I can confidently say that I echo the participants in my dissertation study when I say that I am now a different person. This applies directly to me in terms of my own concept of self but also in terms of my professional self. Before writing the dissertation, I often saw the work of international education in “cut and dry” or “black and white” concepts. Now, I am often considering nuance within our work and questioning how we arrive at our conclusions and asking for more qualitative inquiry such as the “spirit” of regulatory framework rather than the technical specifications. This is in direct result of my dissertation experience.

Transformative Scholarship

Writing the dissertation has brought forth a variety of conviction challenging exercises and challenging. My constructivist worldview has historically led me to decision making informed simply by experience and trial and error, yet that “understanding or reality is always partial and imperfect” (Kezar, et al., 2016, p. 19). The process of writing the dissertation has vastly altered how I will move about my professional endeavors moving forward. Most significantly, and now as scholar, I know that incorporating critical inquiry is necessary to further my success as a practitioner because “theory and practice are reliant on one another” (Shultz, 2010, p. 62). Employing scholarship to either confirm or contradict my preconceived understanding and utilizing qualitative research methods supports my goal of “making a difference in people’s lives” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.1). I will not only be incorporating proven

data into my professional activities, but also seeking inquiry as a means to problem solving and strategic planning. *Ultimately, how this dissertation has influenced my practice as a scholar is that it transformed me into one.*

I had long held a deep misunderstanding that I was not capable of doctoral level inquiry. As a mid-career professional who succeeded particularly well at practitioner work, I feared the dissertation process. Even the process of determining what questions and problems of practice I wanted to address felt substantially impossible. The literature review felt much like what Mezirow's (1991) "disorienting dilemma." The entire process of seeking, studying, and immersing myself in literature was foreign to me. I felt completely out of my intellectual depth, and it seemed completely impossible to endeavor forward.

Until that point, I was sure I knew that I wanted to study Omani citizens and the impact their study abroad experiences had on their community engagement but even explaining that seemed overwhelming and hard. However, through the literature review process that I found a wider, more impactful problem of practice in international education and became curious about how the experience of studying abroad impacts anyone, regardless of nationality, for their entire life. Overcoming the misunderstanding of my own abilities created a catalyst for my own critical reflection which led me to question the "integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience" (Taylor, 2009, p. 7). It was also in the literature review process that I discovered an opportunity to seek scholarship that speaks to my core values which I find embedded in the intentions of international education.

This process also taught me that it is not simply enough to know through experience, but to know through examination and analysis. Previously, I would speak on the benefits and impacts of international study through my own experience or anecdotal evidence from international students. Now, I can directly point to both an existing body of literature, as well as my own scholarly endeavors, to bring forth data-driven evidence of those benefits and impacts.

Engaging in data-driven inquiry was another rewarding component of scholarly research and practice for me. The dissertation process has cemented for me that in my future professional capacities, I will knowingly and routinely be seeking and using data to examine problems of practice in international education and also in my strategic leadership steps to support the “refinement of those steps by purposefully integrating planning, assessment, and budgeting processes” (Bresciani, 2010, p. 40). Writing this dissertation illuminated how scholarly inquiry can be utilized to begin seeking answers to those questions. Having already worked for several years with academics (though always as a university staff member) it was not until I began to study the role of data that I truly understood how the practice does not stop. Before beginning my own study, I was routinely perplexed when working with faculty members who would refer to literature or demonstrate how they were currently examining new data. At the time, it was confusing, and in some cases frustrating, but now I see its imperative role in the work we do. “Continual growth and development” (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013, p. 43) is a goal I have for the international students with whom I work but through this dissertation, I embarked on my own journey of adult learning and found that I, too, have that goal for myself. Through “self-examination” (Mezirow, 1991), my previous held beliefs were

contested which allowed me the opportunity to reconsider the validity of my past assumptions about myself and my academic abilities. I no longer hold the misconception that I am not capable of doctoral level research and have proven those capabilities to myself through the dissertation process.

The cohort model of this program gave way for the opportunity to share with others in the experience of the dissertation process. In doing so, I was incredibly fortunate to witness my classmates and peer reviewer's growth and development and understand that it was not unique to their specific capabilities but rather something I, too, was capable of accomplishing. This "recognition of shared experiences" (Mezirow, 1991) through the cohort further reshaped my own understanding of my scholarly abilities. The challenge of overcoming my preconceived notions about myself and the camaraderie with my classmates propelled my movement through additional phases of transformative learning like "exploring options for new behavior" (Mezirow, 1991) and "trying new roles" (Mezirow, 1991). Before the dissertation process, my activator strength (Clifton, 2019) would drive the way I initially engaged in such large-scale projects, but the dissertation process helped me see the benefit in slowing down and leaning into my context strength (Clifton, 2019).

Now, at the conclusion of the dissertation as well as the entire program, I find that I am not only ready, but quite enthusiastic and eager about the future of my professional endeavors as a proven scholar. Ultimately, the process of engaging in doctoral research and writing the dissertation has shown me that I am not only capable of that level of scholarship, but that I am also capable of still learning and it is not just about the technical specifications of content but also "what goes on in the learner's head,

heart, body, and soul that leads to change in behavior or perspective” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 205).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

First Round Interview Protocol

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. When and where did you study abroad?
3. What do you believe are the reasons you chose to study abroad?
4. Tell me about some of your thoughts and feelings prior to your study abroad experience?
5. What were your initial impressions of your study abroad location and/or university?

Appendix B

Interview Informed Consent

Study Title: THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON OMANI NATIONALS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Study Description: The purpose of this study is to examine the long-term impact on study abroad participants' self-identity and to obtain further understanding of the role of a transformative learning experience in an international setting. Data collected from Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman will inform international education practitioners on the lasting impact of the international student experience after graduation.

Principal Investigator: Jody Pritt

Procedures

You are being asked to take part in a research study. If you decide to take part, you will participate in three, one hour-long interviews responding to questions regarding your study abroad experience. The interviews will take place both electronically and in-person and will be recorded via audio recording platforms. Data from the interview will be coded and evaluated. All data pulled from the interview will be stored securely and only accessible by the principal investigator and one research assistant. Analysis of data will be done so using pseudonyms and no identifying information to maintain and respect confidentiality. The resulting information from the study will be written and discussed in the principal researcher's doctoral dissertation, in a subsequent journal article (if manuscript accepted), presented at a professional conference, and reported in a white paper presented to the Omani Ministry of Higher Education, all of which will make use of pseudonyms and non-identifiable information to further maintain that confidentiality.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

Contact Information

If you have questions about this study, you can contact the University of Missouri researcher at (001-803-348-6427 or japzn3@umsystem.edu or jodypritt@gmail.com). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu.

You can ask the researcher to provide you with a copy of this consent for your records, or you can save a copy of this consent if it has already been provided to you. We appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.

Appendix C

Second Round Interview Protocol

1. Please describe something easy about studying abroad.
2. Please describe something challenging about studying abroad.
3. Please describe a happy memory from your experience studying abroad.
4. Please describe an unhappy memory from your experience studying abroad.
5. How would you describe yourself when you were studying abroad?
6. Sometimes studying abroad changes people. Tell me if you think you experienced any changes from your experience.

Appendix D

Third Round Interview Protocol

1. Please describe a favorite memory from studying abroad.
2. What do you remember feeling as you prepared to return to Oman after graduation?
3. Tell me what it was like for you when you returned home after studying abroad.
4. What do you think about your study abroad experience now?
5. How would you advise friends or family who come to you asking if they should study abroad?

Appendix E

Focus Group Informed Consent

Study Title: THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON OMANI NATIONALS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Study Description: The purpose of this study is to examine the long-term impact on study abroad participants' self-identity and to obtain further understanding of the role of a transformative learning experience in an international setting. Data collected from Omani citizens who studied in the United States and now live and work in Oman will inform international education practitioners on the lasting impact of the international student experience after graduation.

Principal Investigator: Jody Pritt

Procedures

You are being asked to take part in a research study. If you decide to take part, you will participate in one two hour focus group responding to questions regarding your study abroad experience. The focus group will take place in-person and will be recorded via audio recording platforms. Data from the focus group will be coded and evaluated. All data will be stored securely and only accessible by the principal investigator and one research assistant. Analysis of data will be done so using pseudonyms and no identifying information to maintain and respect confidentiality. The resulting information from the study will be written and discussed in the principal researcher's doctoral dissertation, in a subsequent journal article (if manuscript accepted), presented at a professional conference, and reported in a white paper presented to the Omani Ministry of Higher Education, all of which will make use of pseudonyms and non-identifiable information to further maintain that confidentiality.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

Contact Information

If you have questions about this study, you can contact the University of Missouri researcher at (001-803-348-6427 or japzn3@umsystem.edu or jodypritt@gmail.com). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu.

You can ask the researcher to provide you with a copy of this consent for your records, or you can save a copy of this consent if it has already been provided to you. We appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.

Appendix F

Focus Group Protocol

1. Will each of you please introduce yourselves and tell the group when and where you studied abroad?
2. Why did you study abroad?
3. Think back to your first days on campus. Describe what you were feeling.
4. What was something you enjoyed about studying abroad?
5. What was something you did not enjoy about studying abroad?
6. Now think back to your first days after returning home. Describe how you were feeling.
7. Do you discuss your study abroad experience with your peers (family, friends, professional)?
8. Do you recommend studying abroad to people in your life? (Family, friends, professional).

Appendix G

Oral History Interview Prompt

Please tell me about your experience studying abroad as if it were a short story. You may describe the experience in any way you feel necessary.

Appendix H

Researcher CITI Certification

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM) COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this [Requirements Report](#) reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate [Transcript Report](#) for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Jody Pritt (ID: 8820073)
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of Missouri-Columbia (ID: 1598)
- **Institution Email:** jodypritt@mail.missouri.edu

- **Curriculum Group:** SBR - Basic
- **Course Learner Group:** SBR Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 35013496
- **Completion Date:** 27-Jan-2020
- **Expiration Date:** 26-Jan-2023
- **Minimum Passing:** 75
- **Reported Score*:** 97

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	23-Jan-2020	3/3 (100%)
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	23-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	24-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	27-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	27-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections (ID: 14)	27-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	27-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kf1ad803d-ca63-4f42-8e43-5689a3f0e079-35013496

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 Email: support@citiprogram.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Jody Pritt (ID: 8820073)
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of Missouri-Columbia (ID: 1598)
- **Institution Email:** jodypritt@mail.missouri.edu

- **Curriculum Group:** SBR - Basic
- **Course Learner Group:** SBR Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 35013496
- **Report Date:** 03-Feb-2020
- **Current Score**:** 97

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	23-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	23-Jan-2020	3/3 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	24-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	27-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections (ID: 14)	27-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	27-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	27-Jan-2020	4/5 (80%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	24-Jan-2020	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?xf1ad803d-ca63-4f42-8e43-5689a3f0e079-35013496

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org

Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

Appendix I
Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia
FWA Number: 00002876
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

310 Jesse Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

December 10, 2021

Principal Investigator: Jody Pritt (MU-Student)
Department: Educational Leadership-EDD

Your IRB Application to project entitled **THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON OMANI NATIONALS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION** was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2080245
IRB Review Number	354803
Initial Application Approval Date	December 10, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	December 10, 2022
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
HIPAA Category	No HIPAA
Approved Documents	Updated focus group informed consent to remove duplicate text Updated Interview informed consent to remove duplicate text Interview and Focus Group protocols Recruitment email to be sent to recommended potential participants

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

- No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
 - All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
 - Major noncompliance deviations must be reported to the MU IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of the research team becoming aware of the deviation. Major deviations result when research activities may affected the research subject's rights, safety, and/or welfare, or may have had the potential to impact even if no actual harm occurred. Please refer to the MU IRB Noncompliance policy for additional details.
 - The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
-

- Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Appendix J

Recommendation Letter: Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center



Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center

24 November 2021

Letter of Recommendation for Ms. Jody Pritt

With compliments,

It is my pleasure to write a letter of recommendation for Ms. Jody Pritt to carry out research in the Sultanate. Ms. Pritt has been a friend of the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center (SQCC) since 2014. She has traveled to the Sultanate on several occasions, and always promotes SQCC and Oman in the most positive manner in her public interactions.

Ms. Pritt currently serves as director of the International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) at Georgia State University. She previously worked at the University of South Carolina as director of International Student Services.

Ms. Pritt is currently pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri, Columbia. Her dissertation will focus on international education and the impact it makes on students.

As part of her dissertation research, Ms. Pritt would like to interview twenty Omanis who studied abroad and see how their time abroad impacted their experiences upon their return, and in the years after. She will also conduct two focus groups (separated by gender).

We would be most appreciative if you can facilitate all necessary assistance to Ms. Pritt in order for her to carry out her research in the Sultanate.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Ridolfo
Executive Director

Appendix K

Sponsorship Approval: Sultan Qaboos University

Sultan Qaboos University

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
OFFICE



جامعة السلطان قابوس

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January 10, 2022

Ref: ICO/ 155/2022

Ms. Jody Pritt
University of Missouri-Columbia

Subject: Acceptance Letter

After greetings,

This is to inform you that your application to conduct your research titled "The Transformative Impacts of International Study on Omani" at Sultan Qaboos University for two weeks starting from February 28, 2022 is accepted.

Please accept our kind regards.

Thank you,

Mahmood Al-Kindi
Director



VITA

Jody Pritt grew up in West Virginia where she attended Marshall University for her undergraduate and graduate studies. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in international affairs, she participated in the *Appalachians Teach Abroad Program* in China where she taught English as a Foreign Language at Henan Education College in Zhengzhou, Henan. It was that experience which led her to endeavors to work in international education, so she returned to Marshall and earned a master's in student affairs counseling, customizing her entire program for a career in international education. Her first position in the field was as an international student advisor at the University of South Carolina. Since then, she has held several leadership positions at Missouri State University, the University of South Carolina, Drury University, and currently at Georgia State University where she serves on numerous professional and service committees. She has also taught various subjects at several institutions including English as a Second Language, Writing Composition, Graduate Practicum Courses, and Professional Development Seminars. She is also an instructor for Global Pro Labs.

She is a member of the Georgia Middle East Council and the Southeast Regional Middle East and Islamic Studies Society and serves on the Greater Atlanta AMIS Advisory Board. She has also been active in volunteer leadership roles at NAFSA: Association of International Educators serving in various positions, most notably as the NAFSA Region VII Chair and Regional Chair-Cohort Coach. She was awarded an *International Education Administrator Fulbright Award* to South Korea in 2012. Previously she was awarded the *Excellence in International Education Individual Award* from the Diversity Abroad Network and the *Marjorie Peace Lenn Research Award* from

the American International Research Council. In 2022, she was awarded the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) *Harold Josephson Award for Professional Promise in International Education*.

In addition to this dissertation, she has engaged in other scholarly endeavors in Oman including serving as program director for a study abroad program there and also authoring a chapter on higher education in an upcoming edited volume on the legacy of the late Sultan Qaboos.