

Study abroad: Exploring the pre-departure preparation provided to students, staff and host communities

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Student pre-departure preparation has been identified as essential if study abroad programs involving work-integrated learning are to deliver the numerous benefits they intend, while mitigating the many risks they involve. However, little is known about what preparation is provided to the academic and professional staff who implement these programs, and the community members who host the students. Interviews with 16 academic and professional staff involved in preparing students, staff, and host communities for Australian study abroad programs reveal inconsistencies in the preparation provided to students, and very limited preparation to staff and host communities. The limited preparation that is offered, is designed and developed in an organic (not structured) and inconsistent manner. Our findings suggest that institutions should consider implementing a more structured, consistent and institutionally driven approach to preparation for students, staff, and host communities to reduce the substantial risks associated with these programs while maximizing the benefits.

Keywords: Higher education, learning abroad, pre-departure preparation, student mobility, study abroad

Higher education institutions are increasingly offering their students work-integrated learning opportunities within their study abroad programs for academic credit, with short-term programs (eight weeks or less) growing in popularity over the extensive semester-long exchange programs (Institute of International Education, 2022). By providing students with the opportunity to apply their theoretical learning in a culturally diverse overseas work environment, study abroad involving an international work-integrated learning component can facilitate the development of students' global awareness and cultural competence, key benefits of study abroad programs (Potts, 2016). These programs involve not just immersion in a culturally different community to the student's own, but also involve the student experiencing their potential future occupation within a workplace setting that provides a cultural perspective different to that available domestically. The increase in such programs has been facilitated by national governments providing funding to increase the number of participating students from countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) (Institute of International Education, 2021; International Education Association of Australia, 2022; Universities UK International, 2021). With this trend of increasing the numbers of students participating in short-term study abroad programs, it is critical to ensure these programs are well planned and that all stakeholders are appropriately prepared to ensure a positive, culturally safe, and transformative learning experience, not just for the students, but also for the staff who develop and implement the programs, and the communities who host the students.

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Preparing higher education students for their participation in a study abroad program is essential as studies suggest that pre-departure preparation increases the probability that students gain the benefits these programs provide (Ryan-Krause, 2016; Shields et al., 2016). These benefits have been found to substantially improve a student's future career prospects (Mason O'Connor et al., 2011), build their confidence, resourcefulness, and adaptability (Davies et al., 2017), and improve their intercultural and global competence (Potts, 2016). Within study abroad programs, pre-departure preparation refers to the suite of activities aiming to orient students to the cultural context of the community they will visit, manage their expectations, and prepare them for learning in a different environment (Australian Collaborative Education Network, 2017; Tan et al., 2015). Indeed, if students are prepared for the challenges of their study abroad program, they demonstrated higher engagement and satisfaction, and achieved more of their intended learning outcomes than students not adequately prepared (Winchester-Seeto, 2019). Further, the lack of appropriate pre-departure preparation has been demonstrated to have a negative impact on the student's learning experience including their ability to appropriately engage with cultures different to their own (Bessette & Camden, 2017). However, little is known about the type of activities and topics that are covered and the effectiveness of the preparation undertaken.

Different professional organizations and associations, and recent studies in the field recommend specific topics and content matter to be included in pre-departure activities for higher education students prior to the students' participation in a study abroad program (Bretag et al., 2016; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2020; World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2018). The most common topics included in pre-departure preparation activities are language, behavior, health and safety, visa requirements, and social, cultural, economic, and environmental impact considerations (Bessette & Camden, 2017; Hartman et al., 2018). Additional topics have been suggested for specific student cohorts. For example, pre-departure preparation activities for occupational therapy students include topics on the laws of the country the students are travelling to, internet availability, social media and peer support options (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2018). Requirements relating to student pre-departure preparation for study abroad are continuing to evolve, with a recent comprehensive review of study abroad programs involving nursing students recommending ethical considerations to the list of topics to be included (Yoder et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, a range of material should be included to appropriately prepare students for their study abroad experience, yet the success of study abroad programs involves two other key stakeholders. These stakeholders are the academic and professional staff who develop and implement programs, and host community members who host the students and staff while they are in-country (Malicki, 2021). The readiness and preparation of these two key stakeholder groups is potentially as important as the participating students.

While the benefits students gain and student learning may be compromised by inadequate student pre-departure preparation, there are also risks to the relationships between the host community and the involved university if academic staff are not adequately prepared. For example, in their evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of a study abroad partnership between a university in the US and two orphanages in Ecuador, Hayward and Li (2017) concluded that academic staff involved needed additional preparation. Without this additional preparation the sustainability of the outcomes for the partner orphanages was perceived to be at risk. Similarly, risks to the sustainability and reciprocity of the relationship with host communities have been identified if host communities are not included in any pre-departure preparation (Shields et al., 2016). Finally, some authors emphasize the importance of effective and timely pre-departure preparation of all stakeholders to mitigate the risk that participation in these programs might normalize paternalistic or colonial relations for institutional and national interests (Powell et al., 2010). Indeed, Crabtree (2013) reports that without pre-departure

preparation of all stakeholders there was a risk that the study abroad program could reinforce existing inequitable power and historical global relations between the sending country and the recipient community.

Pre-departure preparation for study abroad programs for all stakeholders is critically important, not least to ensuring study abroad programs are effective, safe, and sustainable, but also to validating the significant national government funding directed to these programs. Thus, in view of this importance, and the increasing calls for pre-departure preparation to be extended to all stakeholders, this study aims to explore perceptions of the pre-departure preparation provided by academic and professional staff to the three key stakeholder groups involved with study abroad programs: academic and professional staff, higher education students, and host community members. Where pre-departure preparation was provided, a further aim is to ascertain what topics are included.

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

This study used an exploratory qualitative research design. It drew upon a social constructionist interpretive perspective that recognizes participants have unique experiences of study abroad, that these experiences involve social interactions (a key feature of study abroad programs), and that they construct meaning through these experiences (Lock & Strong, 2010).

Participant Selection

Two public Australian universities were selected for this study. Both had study abroad opportunities for their students as part of their institutional strategic objectives, and both operated within the same national higher education system. One university was a large well-established institution where the central business unit that had management responsibility for study abroad programs, including those with an international work-integrated learning component, had won two national awards for programs that enhance student learning and graduate employability (Nay & Tofa, 2020). The other was a smaller, younger institution that had recently embraced the expansion of international opportunities for students in its 2018-2022 strategic plan.

Higher education academic and professional staff from these two universities were recruited via email to participate in this study through convenience sampling and snowballing. The email invitation included a participant information sheet outlining the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality processes, and contact information should a potential participant have any queries or concerns. Of the 21 academic and seven professional staff members invited to participate, a total of 16 agreed, consisting of 10 academic and six professional staff. Each participant submitted a signed consent form to the lead investigator prior to the commencement of their interview.

Setting and Data Collection

Prior to formal data collection, the lead investigator conducted a pilot interview (excluded) to practice and refine the interviewing style and questioning techniques, in addition to trialing the recording technology (Liamputtong, 2013). An interview guide was developed from the literature (Gaul, 2015) with input from the entire research team to ensure questions and language were relevant to the study's aims. Sixteen one-on-one semi-structured online interviews were conducted at a time convenient to the participant. Prior to commencing each interview, all participants were provided with an

opportunity to ask questions regarding the interview process in addition to the overall purpose of the study. The interview guide is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Question guide for interviews with academic and professional staff involved with study abroad programs.

Demographic questions

1. Gender
2. Age range (prompts: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, >54 years)
3. Country of birth
4. Is English your native language?
5. How many other languages do you speak?

Study abroad questions

6. What is your position/role at the university?
7. What is your involvement with study abroad programs?
8. How long have you been involved with study abroad programs?
9. Why did you decide to become involved with study abroad programs?

Pre-departure preparation questions

10. Please outline the student pre-departure briefings you have been involved with and the purpose of each briefing (prompts: academic, administrative, cultural, using previous participants, other).
11. How did you prepare for your involvement with study abroad programs?
12. What steps were undertaken to prepare the community to receive student visitors?
13. How best can students be prepared to understand the culture of the community they visit?

Supplementary questions

14. What do you see as the differences in student learning between the classroom and a study abroad program?
 15. What do you see as the main benefits to the local community of the student visits?
 16. Is there any other information you wish to provide?
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Lead investigator conducted 16 interviews with staff members over two two-month periods during 2020 and 2021. The majority (13/16) of the interviews were with academic and professional staff employed at the institution where the lead investigator was based, with three of the 13 participants unknown to the lead investigator. All six professional staff were from the central business unit that had management responsibility for study abroad programs across their university. One staff member had a dual academic and professional staff role, and as the larger proportion of their time was spent on the academic role, this participant was classified as an academic staff member for the purpose of this study. Each interview was recorded with online video conferencing software (Microsoft Teams) with all ensuing transcripts checked for accuracy by the lead investigator. No repeat interviews were conducted, although one interview was undertaken in two parts, as part-way through the interview the participant needed a few minutes to take a telephone call. The mean (\pm SD) interview duration was 48 min 3 s (9 min 25 s). All the study abroad programs discussed by participants were undertaken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to scrutinize the data (Braun et al., 2019). This six step inductive approach puts the researchers at the heart of knowledge production and provides a step-by-step method for capturing patterns of shared meaning from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Individual transcripts were reviewed independently by the researchers to identify similarities within and across all participants. All researchers were involved with the six steps of data analysis, including generating codes and constructing themes. Any discrepancies on the interpretation of the data were discussed by the researchers presenting arguments for their interpretation. Consensus was always reached following this process. Trustworthiness was established through the use of the step-by-step approach of reflexive thematic analysis (Mackieson et al., 2019). The involvement of all researchers in the generation of themes increased the credibility and dependability of the research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethics Approval

The study was approved by the Committee for Ethics in Human Research at the University of Canberra (project number 1920). Reporting was informed by the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007) as this is considered the most comprehensive reporting guideline for qualitative research and applies to research where data collection is conducted by interview (Walsh et al., 2020).

RESULTS

The participants from both universities agreed on the importance of the pre-departure preparation provided to students to mitigate risks to student learning, and student health and safety while the students were overseas during a study abroad program that included an international work-integrated learning component. However, both academic and professional staff reported that the level and depth of pre-departure preparation provided to them differed substantially from that provided to students, and that the host communities received limited pre-departure preparation. Staff from both universities also reported differing views as to what topics and how much pre-departure preparation should be provided to students. Academic staff were particularly of the view that study abroad programs that included an international work-integrated learning component, despite their benefits for students, come with a myriad of challenges. The results of these findings are organized across three themes: 1) student pre-departure preparation is essential but inconsistent; 2) staff and host community preparation is not evident; and 3) study abroad is perceived as beneficial for students but challenging to offer.

The myriad of study abroad destination countries the staff had been involved with included Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Peru, The Philippines, Tonga, and Vietnam. All programs received some form of Australian national government funding through the *New Colombo Plan* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and/or Office for Learning and Teaching (Department of Education, Skills and Employment). See Table 2 for demographic details of the interview participants.

TABLE 2: Demographic details of interview participants.

Role	Discipline	Gender	Age (years)	Country of birth	Native English speaker	Number of other languages spoken	Study abroad involvement (years)
A1	Medical Imaging	M	>54	Australia	Y	0	5
A2	Public Health	F	>54	Australia	Y	0	7
A3	Midwifery	F	45-54	Australia	Y	0	5
A4	Nutrition	F	45-54	Australia	Y	1	3
A5	Medical Imaging	F	>54	South Africa	N	5	7
A6	Nursing	F	>54	Australia	Y	0	7
A7	Occupational Therapy	M	35-44	Australia	Y	1	6
A8	Design and Built Environment	F	45-54	Australia	Y	0	7
A9	Education	M	35-44	Australia	Y	2	2
A10	Human Geography/ Administration	F	45-54	United Kingdom	Y	0	5
P1	Administration	F	25-34	Australia	Y	0	1
P2	Administration	F	25-34	Australia	Y	0	2
P3	Administration	F	35-44	Serbia	N	3	7
P4	Education	F	25-34	Australia	Y	0	7
P5	Administration	F	45-54	Kenya	N	3	7
P6	Administration	F	35-44	Australia	Y	1	6

Key: A = Academic staff; P = Professional staff; F = Female; M = Male; Y = Yes; N = No.

Theme 1: Student Pre-departure Preparation – it is Essential but Inconsistent

The importance for students to be appropriately prepared for their study abroad program was consistently expressed by all participants. All staff agreed pre-departure preparation was required on academic matters (course/subject requirements, assessments), administrative logistics (accommodation, weather, food, language, vaccinations, health and safety, living standards in the community), cultural knowledge (social customs, appropriate salutations, dress etiquette, religion) plus the inclusion of previous participant perspectives and insights. Some staff reported including additional topics such as self-care, cognitive preparation, child protection, international development topics (for example, poverty) with some including “a session on voluntourism” (Professional 6), where people pay to volunteer in development or conservation projects. Staff indicated that the inclusion of these additional topics was in recognition of the need to challenge students to think more deeply about their social position and that of the community they will be immersed in.

The main reasons behind that is to, to help the students to prepare for the, the academic component...they also talked a little bit more about how to prepare for um cultural differences and cultural shock, um things like that as well. (Academic 7)

The receipt of a national government grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching (through the Australian national government Department of Education, Skills and Employment) provided one of the universities with the capacity to develop a detailed pre-departure preparation program for their students. The program “covered a range of topics largely also dictated by the partner organizations [host communities] themselves” (Academic 10). However, the staff believed it was difficult “to cater a preparation program to all levels” (Professional 6) and for pre-departure preparation to always be relevant and appropriate for every student due to the diversity of students undertaking a study abroad program.

The majority of staff mentioned uncertainty about what topics were covered in the pre-departure preparation activities they were not directly involved with. The staff believed this was due to limited communication between staff involved in different programs indicating “whoever they were I’m sure they’d sent out a whole lot of information to the students around that ah but I wasn’t involved in any of those, those briefings” (Academic 1).

Nevertheless, some staff felt that “there were many ways of doing it [pre-departure preparation] and they weren’t all best practice” (Academic 10), although they did not explicitly indicate whose responsibility it was to improve the preparation. While both groups of staff mentioned that a range of topics was included in the pre-departure preparation for students, in some instances they also mentioned that there was no specific preparation for the individual projects students were going to undertake while on their study abroad program.

Staff mentioned they wanted to prepare students for the ‘unknown’ and to expect the unexpected. Staff agreed that although student pre-departure preparation was essential, there was only so much information that could be provided to them realistically. Staff who considered it was not possible to anticipate every possible scenario that students might experience during the program reported that they wanted to ensure “the student has the skills to cope, not necessarily understand what they’re going to experience” (Academic 7).

There were, however, contradictory views regarding the amount of pre-departure preparation students should complete in advance of their travel with some staff indicating “I don’t want to better prepare them [the students] because I think that, that immersiveness (sic) is, is what they’re going to learn from” (Academic 1). However, other staff were concerned that if they “over-prepare in the wrong way” (Academic 7) they would limit the impact of the program on student learning.

A counter view was that over preparation would be better than “the risk of students going overseas and being disrespectful and dismissive of the culture they’re going into” (Professional 3). Without adequate and appropriate cultural preparation “it can actually solidify some of those stereotypes” (Professional 6).

Theme 2: Staff and Host Community Pre-departure Preparation – it is not Evident

The two groups of staff across both institutions reported that their preparation for involvement in study abroad programs was much less structured than that provided to students. Despite study abroad being a key strategic objective of both universities involving significant national government funding, staff reported scant evidence of a systematic process to preparing them so that they, in turn, could appropriately prepare students for their study abroad program. Most staff reported that they “were pretty much left up to our own devices to be able to do, to do whatever we wanted to do” (Academic 1).

Half of the staff members interviewed did not know how the community was prepared for their involvement to host students participating in a study abroad program, other than for a discussion over the timing and duration of the students' visit. Some of the professional staff members assumed community pre-departure preparation was handled by academic staff, whereas some academic staff indicated it was common for pre-departure preparation for the host community to be completed through a local non-governmental organisation involved with the study abroad program. Where there was some pre-departure preparation of the community "there wasn't actually any preparing, preparedness or briefing happening with [all] those community members, as far as we know" (Academic 7).

Academic staff reported that one of the major factors influencing their ability to appropriately prepare not only themselves, but the students and host communities, was that "it's a lot of work to prepare and there's a, there's a lot of work involved in, in the study, faculty led programs" (Academic 8). Staff indicated the workload that was associated with offering a study abroad program did not appear to be sufficiently understood by colleagues not involved with study abroad programs or adequately recognized through the institutions' academic workload models.

You wouldn't do it because it's, you don't get paid to do all of that. You know you get paid to deliver the unit and that's it. You don't get paid all the extra engagement working with the partner doing all of that kind of stuff. (Professional 5)

Theme 3: Study Abroad is Perceived as Beneficial for Students - but Challenging to Offer

All staff reported that study abroad is "just one of my passions that I have" (Academic 5). They were involved with study abroad due to their genuine belief about the positive benefits the program brings to students' personal and professional development. Staff expressed their desire for students to think more critically about global issues through their study abroad program

My experience has been that it is the academics who are interested and passionate about the benefits of taking students overseas and getting that international perspective are the ones that will put their hands up and put a lot of work into setting them up. (Professional 3)

When exploring staff perceptions about the benefits to the community from hosting students participating in a study abroad program, the responses ranged from staff who did not know what the benefits to the community might be (as they had not specifically explored the benefits) to staff who believed there could be tangible benefits such as money, resources, labour, and intangible benefits such as expanding the community's knowledge base, sphere of influence, the breadth of their relationships, and the development of a network of advocates in Australia. There were also concerns regarding whether study abroad programs and the benefits to communities were sustainable when funding to support these programs was perceived to be unreliable or not guaranteed.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study indicate that while there is agreement about the importance of pre-departure preparation for students undertaking a work-integrated learning program within their study abroad program, there is less agreement about how much preparation should be provided to students, and the specific topics that should be included. Academic and professional staff indicated they had very little knowledge about the specific topics included in the pre-departure preparation activities they were not directly involved with. The need for adequate preparation of students prior to students

undertaking a work-integrated learning program is well established in the literature (Shields et al., 2016). Due to the risks involved the importance of that preparation surges to a new level when the activity is a study abroad program (Bretag et al., 2016). The limited consistency regarding the specific topics to be included in the pre-departure preparation for students, and the limited knowledge by staff about what topics were included, is disappointing given the number of professional organizations and research studies that have recommended specific topics for inclusion in pre-departure preparation (Bretag et al., 2016; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2020; World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2018). It could be argued that these inconsistencies appear to support the recommendation by Bretag et al. (2016) that student pre-departure preparation for study abroad programs should vary across different students depending on the degree of cultural difference between the student's home country and the host country that the student will travel to. However, the variation that was evident in the pre-departure preparation provided to students in our study was a result of the preparation mostly being the responsibility of individual academic staff members.

The inclusion by some staff of additional student pre-departure preparation topics seeking to challenge how students view their social position, while not consistently included for all students, was an encouraging development in the approach to student pre-departure preparation expressed by participants in our study. In their case study based on study abroad internships undertaken in India, Thomas and Luba (2018) suggested that pre-departure preparation for students should move beyond simply ensuring they have a positive experience, to also ensuring both students and staff do not have a detrimental impact on the host community. The authors recommended that pre-departure preparation should include a deeper contextualization of global systems of racism and white fragility to mitigate the risk that students will rely on racist stereotypes to describe their study abroad experience to others after they return home. Without a more structured and consistent approach to the pre-departure preparation provided to students we believe there is a risk students will not gain the global awareness intended from these programs.

The limited preparation provided to the academic and professional staff involved with implementing study abroad programs contrasts with the pre-departure preparation provided to students. We found that staff across both institutions were not offered any structured or organized pre-departure preparation prior to their involvement with a study abroad program. Hayward and Li (2017) have already found that without adequate preparation of the academic staff involved in study abroad programs there is potential risk to the effectiveness of the partnership with the host community. Indeed, inadequate preparation of academic staff may also put the sustainability of the relationship with a host community at risk (Shields et al., 2016), a relationship that is essential to the offering of study abroad programs. To mitigate the negative impacts of study abroad programs on students, staff, and host communities, it is suggested that staff be provided with additional training (Hayward & Li, 2017). This training would provide staff with the skills they need to promote the group dynamics and reflection required for the students to have a powerful learning opportunity, as well as an opportunity that respected the culture of the host community (Galiardi & Koehn, 2011). By providing preparation activities to staff involved in study abroad would be one method for these staff to gain the valuable and essential skills they need to promote successful study abroad programs.

Work integrated learning programs are identified as a high financial and reputational risk activity for higher education institutions, with international programs posing additional legal risks (Cameron et al., 2018). In addition, they are more time consuming and resource intensive than traditional classroom based learning activities (Clark et al., 2016). Given the risks outlined above, we would suggest consideration be given to a more institutionally-driven and consistent approach to how staff are

prepared for their role in developing and implementing study abroad programs. This approach could reduce not only staff workload by removing the need for individual staff to develop individual pre-departure preparation for students, but also the risks to students, institutions and host communities that are associated with the offering of these programs.

Before addressing the pre-departure preparation to be offered to host communities, it is necessary to identify and establish a relationship with members from a potential host community. Establishing a relationship with a host community, especially the long-term relationship identified as critical to study abroad program success (Bosworth et al., 2006), is a key element in the sustainability and mutuality of study abroad programs (Tran & Vu, 2018). Establishing and maintaining these relationships takes time to develop, money to sustain, and effort to nurture. While there has been significant national government funding to support these programs, the often short-term and unreliable nature of the provided funding schemes directly impacts on the sustainability of the programs (Powell et al., 2010) and hence the ability of staff to maintain a relationship with host communities. Cole (2018) has already expressed concerns that study abroad programs are not appropriately planned, promoted, or organized to meet the very goals the staff, institution and government wish to achieve. Hence, relying on individual academic staff members, who may or may not remain with an institution or continue to be involved with study abroad, to develop and maintain a relationship with a host community is a direct risk to the sustainability of these programs. We suggest that institutions consider establishing and nurturing relationships with host communities at an institutional level, rather than at an individual academic level. Maintaining a relationship at an institution level could aid the sustainability of both the study abroad program, and the long-term relationship with a host community that is so critical to the success of study abroad programs.

The limited pre-departure preparation provided to host communities should be a major concern to institutions. More engagement with the host communities was one of the specific recommendations included by Tran et al. (2021) in their report on Australian government funded study abroad programs. Further, there are calls for more consideration on the impact study abroad programs have on these host communities, as many of these communities have fewer resources than those available to the students participating (Kosman et al., 2021). The disparity regarding access to resources led Crabtree (2013) has also led to calls for the pre-departure preparation to be extended to all participants in a study abroad program to mitigate any potential for these programs to normalize paternalistic or colonial relations. The risk of students on a study abroad program benefitting at the expense of resource poor communities has also led to suggestions that the community should be more of a partner in these programs (Powell et al., 2010). The inclusion of host communities as more of a partner in international work-integrated learning experiences also addresses concerns expressed by Hammersley et al. (2018) in their study exploring who is best placed to develop the curriculum for these experiences. The authors found that the more involved the host community was in developing the curriculum, there was less potential for students to demonstrate a shallow and simplistic notion about the roots of social inequality and how they view their social position. Higher education institutions that not only accept national government funding, but also state study abroad as a strategic objective, should ensure a more structured, consistent and inclusive pre-departure preparation program is available to all stakeholders. In particular, consideration should be given to pre-departure preparation being provided to the host communities to mitigate the economic, social, environmental, and cultural risks these programs can have on host communities.

While a strength of this research project was the broad range of disciplines and variety of study abroad programs included, a limitation is that the findings were restricted to academic and professional staff

from two Australian higher education institutions. However, the long-term involvement with study abroad programs of the staff interviewed and the variety of countries and discipline areas covered, mitigates this limitation to some degree. Another limitation was the endogenous nature of this research. We are aware of the advantages and challenges associated with conducting such endogenous research in the area of study abroad (Fleming, 2018). The use of a structured and systematic approach to the research, including the use of reflexive thematic analysis to analyze the data and identify shared patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2019), together with the use of the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007), increased the rigor and reduced the potential for researcher bias (Mackieson et al., 2019) associated with this qualitative research.

CONCLUSION

Academic and professional staff believe in the benefits of study abroad programs that include a work-integrated learning component to challenge how students think about their place in a global society and how they view the systemic issues that impact a global world. This study found that these benefits can be at risk to being realized due to an inconsistent and somewhat ad hoc approach to the pre-departure preparation that is provided to three key stakeholder groups involved with study abroad, namely students, staff, and host communities. These risks include normalizing paternalistic or colonial relations, reinforcing existing stereotypes, and the health and safety of all study abroad participants.

Study abroad programs, while of strategic importance to institutions, are also high-risk activities for them. The significant national government funding supporting study abroad programs highlights an importance of these programs to government soft power diplomatic agendas. This study suggests that for the myriad of benefits to be realized from participation in a study abroad program, pre-departure preparation should be extended to staff and host communities. In addition, consideration should be given to a more institutionally-driven and consistent approach to that pre-departure preparation. Such an approach could reduce inconsistencies in the pre-departure preparation provided, and the academic workload associated with the development of that pre-departure preparation. Institutions and funding bodies should acknowledge and ameliorate the challenges that are associated with designing and implementing programs that encourage students to consider their position in society, as well as celebrating the benefits these programs provide to students. We acknowledge the significant government funding that is provided to higher education institutions to facilitate an increase in the number of students participating in a work-integrated learning program within their study abroad program. However, this study suggests there may be a need for further research into the appropriate level and distribution of funding required to provide a quality study abroad program if the programs are to have a positive impact on students, staff and host communities. Future research would benefit from exploring student and host community perspectives on the preparation they undertake prior to their participation in a study abroad program that includes an international work-integrated learning component.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as " *An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development*" (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38^{*}). Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ; www.wilnz.nz), and the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and receives periodic sponsorship from the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), University of Waterloo, and the World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE).

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is of two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

^{*}Zegwaard, K. E., Pretti, T. J., Rowe, A. D., & Ferns, S. J. (2023). Defining work-integrated learning. In K. E. Zegwaard & T. J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-48). Routledge.



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