

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, SOCIOLOGY, AND
EDUCATION

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THEIR STUDY ABROAD
EXPERIENCES

ALISON MUSCATO
SPRING 2014

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree in Community, Environment and Development
with honors in Community, Environment and Development

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Theodore Alter
Professor of Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Economics
Thesis Supervisor, Honors Adviser

Anouk Patel
Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology
Thesis Second Reader

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

This study examines students' perceptions of the impact of their experiences studying abroad. Study abroad is a complex and dynamic topic, with many interesting implications as society becomes more globalized. Study abroad programs vary based on many structural factors such as length of stay, location, quality of institutions and language immersion. Student experiences associated with such programs are influenced by these structural factors as well as personal factors including the student's personality and goals for the trip. My research question is, "How do students perceive the impact of their study abroad experience?" I employed a method of narrative inquiry in order to obtain in-depth and personal profiles detailing the perceptions of five current undergraduate students at Penn State regarding their experience. This study specifically focuses on how students perceive the personal impacts of their international experience, what factors shape these perceptions and what the short and long-term impacts are. This research will set the direction and highlight important themes for future analysis of the impacts of studying abroad.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| List of Figures | iii |
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| Chapter 1 Introduction | 1 |
| Background | 1 |
| Purpose and Objectives | 2 |
| Chapter 2 Literature Review | 5 |
| Reasons for Studying Abroad | 5 |
| Students' Personal Development While Abroad..... | 7 |
| Applications of Existing Research | 9 |
| Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework | 11 |
| Cognitive Theory of Motivation | 11 |
| Theory of Planned Behavior | 12 |
| Research Questions | 14 |
| Chapter 4 Methodology..... | 15 |
| Project Description | 15 |
| Research Procedures..... | 16 |
| Chapter 5 Student Profiles..... | 19 |
| A Juggling Act from Beginning to End..... | 20 |
| Be Part of the Culture, Not in Your Own Bubble | 35 |
| Climbing Waterfalls... Definitely Worth It | 47 |
| The more you experience, the more you learn. | 58 |
| Realizing What's Important, What's Not and When to Jump In Head First..... | 67 |
| Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion..... | 84 |
| Background | 84 |
| Motivations | 84 |
| Expectations and Outcomes | 88 |
| Meaning and Significance | 91 |
| Chapter 7 Recommendations and Conclusion | 93 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 95 |

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1. Conceptual Diagram of Motivation..... 16

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Ted Alter for his continuous guidance, support and very sound advice throughout my undergraduate career and especially regarding my thesis. I am also very thankful for Anouk Patel and her help and encouragement throughout writing my thesis.

I would like to thank my parents, Nina and Peter Muscato, for encouraging me in everything I do and never failing to be a strong source of support, humor and help for me.

I am so thankful for Marvin, Monica, Elliot, Taoran and Ericka and their willingness to share their stories with me; without them this thesis would not have been possible.

I am also indescribably thankful for the opportunities I have had to study abroad. For these opportunities, I am extremely grateful to Penn State, The College of Agricultural Sciences, The Schreyer Honors College and the many professors and peers who made those experiences so amazing.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Many undergraduate students in the United States elect to spend some time during their college career studying abroad. During the 2010-2011 academic year, 273,996 US students studied abroad to receive academic credit. Over the past two decades, the number of US students participating in study abroad programs has more than tripled (Institute of International Education, 2012, p.2). Universities offer students a variety of ways to study abroad. At Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), students can select a wide variety of programs in countries all over the world. The Penn State University Office of Global Programs (UOGP) advertises 156 programs for undergraduate students. Students are able to search programs based on the city, country or region they desire to travel to as well as other factors including language of instruction, minimum grade point average (GPA) requirement, courses offered and scholarships.

Similar to the numbers of US students studying abroad, Penn State also experienced an increase of students participating in international education, although at a much lesser rate than the US as a whole. Between the 2010-2011 academic year, the number of Penn State students studying abroad increased by 4.5% (UOGP, 2011). In other words, the US percentage of students studying abroad increased by 200% while at Penn State, the number increased by 4.5%. This disparity suggests that all universities differ in trends of study abroad, programs offered, resources allocated to programs and incentives for international education. These many differences emphasize the importance of studying individual universities, as well as individual students. However, it is also valuable to conduct broad analysis, throughout the whole US, in order to gain a more thorough understanding of study abroad trends in America.

Research indicates that studying abroad benefits student development through attaining increased foreign language proficiency, intercultural understanding, knowledge of the host country and, “a more realistic appraisal of their capabilities,” (Chieffo, 2000, p.2). Also, globalization appears to influence the increase of students studying abroad. Globalization refers to the increasing integration of the world in terms of communication, culture and economics (Iqbal, 2012). As the global community establishes more and more connections across borders and nationalities, international education becomes an invaluable resource for undergraduate students. Studying abroad, as well as a students’ whole undergraduate career, never follows a predictable path. Therefore studying abroad should not be researched as an objective subject with definite causes and conclusive results. In-depth narratives of individual students’ experiences will add more detail and personality to the body of literature on studying abroad.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of my research is to study student perceptions of the impacts of their study abroad experience. Before elaborating on the purpose of my research project, I need to clarify how I use the words, “reason,” and “impact,” in the context of my research. First, when I describe the “reasons” why students study abroad, I am referring to the motivations and explanations for students to study abroad. These can include desire to increase foreign language proficiency, earn credits towards a degree or meet new people. Reasons why students study abroad can easily be generalized and converted into statistical information to depict large scale trends. Second, I use the word “impact” in reference to the changes in students’ personal values, beliefs and attitudes that may occur from studying abroad. For this research project, the impacts I am trying to assess are related to personal development and are not easily quantifiable. However, there are other results from studying abroad besides personal development and so the term, “impact,” must also apply to the more quantifiable skills and resources that students gain from studying abroad. I anticipate that impacts of study abroad experiences are closely related

to the reasons why students go abroad. I am curious to find out how students are impacted by studying abroad and what factors are involved.

I desire to research this phenomenon because I have personal interest in the topic. My major is International Development at Penn State and I have studied abroad twice in my undergraduate career. I am passionate about travel, different cultures and international education. I find the topic of international experiences extremely interesting and engaging. This study allows me to interact with other students who have had international experiences and hear their stories in order to understand the broader implications of studying abroad. My personal purposes for the study will shape my research in two main ways. First, since I have had international experiences, I have my own insight into this topic and will ask thought-provoking and analytical questions to the students I will interview. Second, I have personal knowledge of students who have studied abroad, a fact which will enable me to easily find interviewees.

I believe that both of my experiences abroad have had substantial impacts on my life, mostly in the long term but in the short-term as well. Additionally, I gained a lot of valuable research and educational experience abroad. The way I experienced my study abroad programs was very positive and will affect decisions I make in the future. This has led me to believe that other students may also feel that their studies abroad have impacted their lives, whether it has shaped their career path, living location, major, interests or other life decisions. I believe there will be a wide variety of stories and opinions among the profiles which will emphasize the importance of student interests, motives and attitudes, as well as type of program, location and length of program in shaping their experiences abroad.

This research can be used to improve the development and organization of study abroad programs at Penn State, encourage more students to study abroad and define study abroad as an important part of students' education in the global society. My main research question focuses on student perceptions of how their study abroad experience will impact them. I also created two more specific questions in order to address what factors influence their perceptions and the short and long-term impacts. My specific research questions are:

Overarching Question: How do students perceive the impact of their study abroad experience?

Sub-Question 1: What factors shape these perceptions?

Sub-Question 2: What are the anticipated short and long-term impacts of study abroad?

Going Forward. In the following section, I will briefly discuss and analyze the existing body of literature on studying abroad. I will summarize and make analytical observations on some of these works. As a response to what I have discovered from my research of the literature, I will suggest what my project addresses that these other sources do not. Next, I will describe the project I have completed and indicate the methods I have used. I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the approach as well. To conclude, I will analyze the data, draw conclusions and report on the expected significance of my research project.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

I have researched a wide variety of sources regarding the various aspects of US students studying abroad. I intend to report what I have found in order to provide a substantial base of information on studying abroad. This will demonstrate which aspects of study abroad existing research has focused on and which aspects may need further research. I will summarize the existing concepts, theories, methodological approaches, definitions and focal points of this topic and critically evaluate these works.

Reasons for Studying Abroad

Many researchers focus on the personal and global reasons for studying abroad in order to explain the most common reasons why students elect to study abroad. In *Culture shock: A student's perspective of study abroad and the importance of promoting study abroad* programs, Miller claims that there are several reasons why students choose to study abroad. First, and most commonly, students travel abroad because they want to refine their foreign language skills. Second, they desire to promote awareness and significance of other cultures within their respective majors. Third, business majors seek to establish international contacts (Miller, 1993). This last point bears significance to Penn State study abroad statistics since business administration majors comprise 20.6% of all Penn State students studying abroad (UOGP, 2011). Kitansas's work titled *Studying abroad: The role of college student's goals on the development of cross-cultural skills and global understanding* uses the Study Abroad Goals Scale to reveal the three most common factors for studying abroad that students indicated. The three factors include, to enhance cross cultural skills, to become more proficient in the subject matter and to

socialize. The purpose of this study is to show how students' goals influence their achievement of these outcomes (Kitansas, 2004). I will discuss the outcomes of this study and how the study relates to students' personal development in the next section.

In the article, *Women and cultural learning in Costa Rica: Reading the contexts*, Anderson discusses the similarities between motivations for studying abroad and engaging in tourist activities. Both groups of people are searching for a transformative and authentic international experience. "Students personalize their perceptions of other nationalities after having the experience of living in a different country," (Anderson, 2003, p.48). Once personal perceptions have been developed, individuals can relate to another culture on a new and familiar level. This embodies the idea of intercultural sensitivity which, "is defined by the emotion that people bring to intercultural interactions. It requires a person to have a positive attitude toward those from other cultures," (Forgues, 2005, p.6). Although intercultural sensitivity is not a direct reason to study abroad, I believe that this idea and other global trends and theories form large-scale influences for why students study abroad.

Internationalism refers to the advocacy of cooperation between nations and suggests another impetus for students to study abroad. Forgues states that, "internationalism is so important to student success in life that it must be incorporated into the curriculum....further recognition that our students require a perspective that is broader than that offered on one campus in one country," (Forgues, 2005, p. 1). I believe this quote supports the desire of students to receive an education that extends beyond the typical classroom setting: an education that exposes them to diversity. Our society is becoming increasingly more diverse and in order to succeed, students need to receive a multicultural education. This is defined as:

A structured process, designed to foster understanding, acceptance, and constructive relations among people of many different cultures. Ideally, [multicultural education] encourages people to see different cultures as a source of learning and to respect diversity in the local, national and international environment. (Forgues, 2005, p. 14).

The previously discussed concepts of intercultural sensitivity, internationalism and multicultural education are all related to the larger trend of globalization. The world is

getting smaller as more and more connections develop between nations' communications, cultures and economies. This reality demonstrates the need for students to be able to work in a diverse society and places further importance and value on study abroad programs.

Students' Personal Development While Abroad

Common themes that researchers typically explore within the topic of student development abroad include, "expectations, contrast, understanding/not understanding, language, identity, regional associations and change," (Miner, 2008, p.iii). These themes are evident in research that focuses on the entirety of the student's international experience. For example, in *Culture shock: A student's perspective of study abroad and the importance of promoting study abroad programs*, Miller divides the experience into the time prior to the trip, the stay itself and then the reentry stage (Miller, 1993). Different themes exist within each of the stages and some exist throughout all three. Expectations occur prior to the trip and then are constantly being contrasted and evaluated during the stay. Students also experience different levels of understanding/not understanding, language and regional association throughout their stay in another country. In the reentry stage, change applies to if and how the students have changed as a result of their time abroad, as well as revisiting the previous expectations from the stage prior to the trip.

Kitsantas's study employs a questionnaire for students before and after their trip in order to measure their personal growth and whether or not they achieved their goals. The results supported the initial hypothesis that, "study abroad programs enhance students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding," (Kitsantas, 2004, p.5). I believe this is a valid aspect of studying abroad to research because focusing on students' goals emphasizes that individual students can have varying degrees of growth based on how they desire their experience to unfold. However, I do not think change or personal growth

can adequately be measured by a questionnaire because so many diverse factors affect a students' experience abroad.

Research highlights several main factors that influence student development abroad. First, the aspects of comfort and familiarity affect students' experiences. The debate is whether students learn as much from experiences that are seemingly familiar and comfortable as they do from experiences that are unfamiliar and challenging. Students have, "invaluable and, for some, even a life-changing experience despite, and in some ways because of the challenges we describe," (Landau & Moore, 2001, p. 2). The challenges this quote refers to include racial tensions, segregated housing and economic disparities between the US students studying abroad at the University of Legon in Ghana and the African students at the university. The author also outlines some assumptions about study abroad programs located in Western Europe. Most US students who study abroad in Western Europe find racial sameness and a roughly equal economic status among sending/receiving nations. However, the author states that these are assumptions of programs in Western Europe, not facts, since her study mostly focuses on the University of Legon. Regardless, the author's comparison suggests that location of the study abroad program will affect the students' experience. Of course, it depends on the student whether they will benefit more from an unfamiliar and challenging study abroad location or a familiar and comfortable one.

Second, another important aspect of study abroad is the structure of the program. According to the Institute of International Education, 58.1% of undergraduate students in the US participated in short-term study abroad, meaning for the summer or less than 8 weeks. 38.0% of students participated in a mid-length study abroad, meaning up to two quarters or one semester. 3.9% of students participated in a study abroad program that lasted the entire academic year (Institute of International Education, 2012). I will focus on two main types of programs within the Penn State UOGP, embedded/short-term and semester/year-long programs. The 2011 Education Abroad Profile indicates that 1,167 students participated in short-term/embedded programs and 1,510 students participated in semester/year long programs (2011 Education Abroad Profile, 2012). Approximately 93% of semester/year long participants were juniors and seniors. Embedded/short-term

programs, on the other hand, appeal to a greater range of academic levels. Even within these two main categories, the structure of each study abroad program varies. For example, some study abroad programs offer home-stays, where the student lives with a local family during their time abroad. The study regarding the University of Ghana, Legon makes a case for why home-stays are a more culturally authentic experience. One student interviewed in the study said that, “part of the experience is being in Ghanaian society,” (Landau & Moore, 2001). This quote was in response to the discussion of foreign students living on the same floor in a dormitory. Given the diversity of experiences which programs offer, research must acknowledge the differences between the programs. This research could provide valuable insight into the comparison between program types.

Third, an extremely important factor of student development is how the student desires or anticipates their international experience to unfold. This aspect of study abroad has been relatively untouched within research on the topic. Kitsantas studies how students’ goals for studying abroad influence the development of cross-cultural skills as well as global understanding. However, this research indicates that the study can, “provide insight on who benefits the most from study abroad experiences,” (Kitsantas, 2004, p.2). I do not think that a study should attempt to rank who benefits more from international experiences. Due to the complex and personal nature of the topic, researchers should study and analyze students’ experience abroad through in-depth qualitative research methods.

Applications of Existing Research

Most research on study abroad is practically applied to program development; the results of the research often suggest implications for future study abroad programs and how certain factors could be improved. Forgues emphasizes that study abroad administrators can benefit from the results of study abroad research. Additionally, he declares that if research proves studying abroad successfully teaches students valuable

lessons about diversity and intercultural sensitivity, “that would provide a compelling reason for expansion of study abroad programs,” (2005, p.10). However, other study abroad research is applied to conclusions about individual and personal development. For example, study abroad provides individuals with new and challenging situations and opportunities such as the ability to learn about their own country through the honesty of foreigners (Landau & Moore, 2001). That example refers to American students speaking about foreigners sharing their opinions and asking questions about America. American students travelling abroad often must face difficult stereotypes and assumptions that others have made about America and challenge the stereotypes and assumptions they have made about other countries. The broad impacts of study abroad research include promoting peace around the world and increasing the ability to solve global problems through understanding and respect.

I have categorized most study abroad research into two broad groups; personal and global reasons for studying abroad and student development. Research in the first category examines why students study abroad; the most popular reason is foreign language acquisition. Also, broad themes related to globalization such as intercultural sensitivity influence students to study abroad so they may increase their appreciation of diversity and function successfully in a more connected world. Research on student development and personal growth during study abroad programs includes focusing on the factors that determine how a study abroad experience will go, as well as other aspects that influence this, such as students’ goals. I believe that research needs to be done in both of these categories. My research project combines the two categories and studies the topic of study abroad through in-depth and personal interviews rather than concluding with broad generalizations about students who study abroad.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

This section will provide a theoretical framework for my research. I have studied the Cognitive Theory of Motivation, as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior in order to analyze how motivations, expectations, goal-setting and self-efficacy influence a specific behavior; in the context of my research, this behavior refers to studying abroad. These theories guide the formation of my research questions and the selection of my methodology.

Cognitive Theory of Motivation

To fully understand the ways in which students perceive the impacts of their study abroad experience, I have applied the Cognitive Theory of Motivation. This theory explores how a person can motivate themselves to engage in a certain behavior. Bandura's theory asserts that people's expectations guide their behavior; one will act in ways they believe will produce an outcome they desire (Bandura, 1989). It also distinguishes between two different types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive to fulfill inner potential and interests. Extrinsic motivation is the desire to achieve tangible rewards such as praise or money (Whitbourne, 2011). Another aspect of this theory is the idea of self-efficacy. If an individual believes they will be successful, they generally have higher goals and stronger commitment (Tollefson, 2000). This theory asserts that expectations relate to behavior.

If expectations and desired outcomes lead to certain behaviors, then students pursue various experiences in order to achieve certain outcomes or expectations. I am researching study abroad as that certain behavior. Studying abroad is one of these

experiences which students frequently choose to engage in during their undergraduate career. I am curious to know why. Especially because there are so many factors that result in the decision to study abroad, and these pertaining factors are different for every student. This is why I believe each student should be studied individually, because every student who studies abroad does not have the same connection between expectations and behaviors. I also want to better understand how expectations and their alignment with actual results affect how the student perceives their experience.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior complements Bandura's Cognitive Theory of Motivation. In his writings, Ajzen asserts that studying behavior must account for variability across situations rather than relying on aggregations of data and information. His theory is, "a theory designed to predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts," (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). A major element of this theory is intention. As noted in the Cognitive Theory of Motivation, an individual's intention to perform a certain behavior embodies the motivational factors that influence behaviors. Intentions indicate how much effort an individual will contribute to achieve a given behavior. A general tendency under this theory is that if an individual has strong intentions for a behavior, it is more likely that they will perform this behavior and achieve their desired results (Ajzen, 1991). However the existence of strong intentions does not guarantee that the individual will initiate a particular behavior.

Factors such as availability of resources and opportunities influence, and potentially limit, whether or not an individual will perform a given behavior. Therefore, behavior depends both on motivation, or the intentions, and ability, referred to by Ajzen as behavioral control. There are three determinants of an individual's intentions. First, the individual's attitude toward the behavior will determine whether or not they intend to perform that behavior. Second, subjective norms are social factors which place pressure on the individual to perform or not perform the behavior. Third, the degree to which the

individual perceives behavioral control and their intentions depend on if it will be easy or challenging to perform the behavior. This third determinant reflects past experiences and anticipated obstacles to the behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). In general, the more favorable the individual's attitude and social norms, and the greater the individuals' perceived behavioral control, the stronger the intention will be to perform the behavior. This is also related to the Cognitive Theory of Motivation and the claims made regarding goal setting as well as self-efficacy.

In addition to intention, behavioral control is the second factor that indicates what behaviors an individual will choose. Two types of behavioral control affect individuals' actions. Actual behavioral control refers to whether or not individuals have resources and opportunities. This very clearly will impact their ability to perform the given behavior. Perceived behavioral control is similar to Bandura's idea of self-efficacy: people behave in certain ways based on their confidence in their ability to perform (Ajzen, 1991, p. 184). A combination of the individual's attitude, social norms and perceived behavioral control determine the individual's intentions. These intentions in turn influence their behaviors.

The connection between motivation and behavior is complex and specific to each individual. The focus of my inquiry is the affect of students' attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioral control on the behavior of studying abroad. Specifically, I will examine student narratives regarding their experience abroad to determine how these factors influence their behavior. I believe this theoretical framework demonstrates the importance of analyzing individual stories and inspiring individuals to consider their personal motivations for their behavior. The theories presented in this section highlight the importance of analyzing behavior to discern motivation. In light of these theories, I have constructed a conceptual diagram to model how these elements interact.

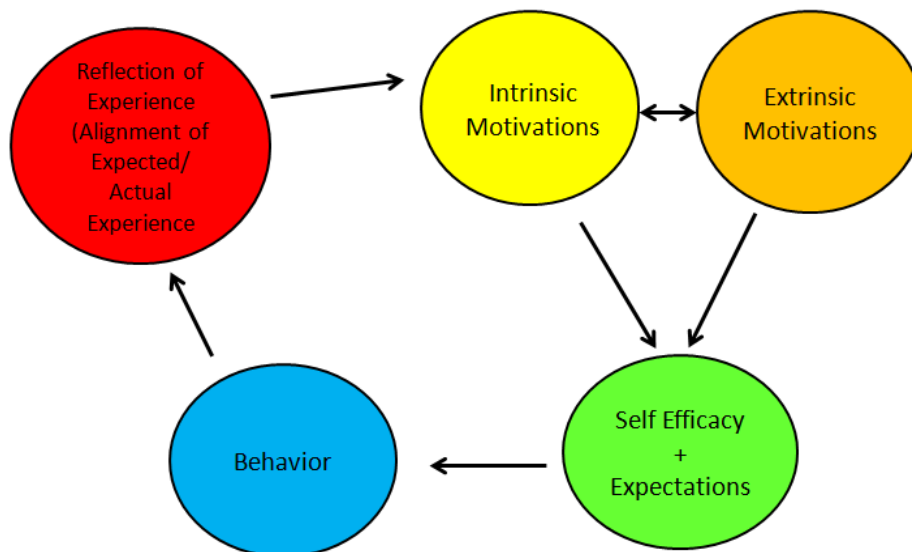


Figure 1-1.

Research Questions

The method of narrative inquiry will encourage students to analyze and reflect on their experiences abroad. My research will provide the ability not only for students to engage in this process, but also for others to observe and understand the importance of this process and how it will enrich study abroad literature. In light of these theories, once again my research questions are:

Overarching Question: How do students perceive the impact of their study abroad experience?

Sub-Question 1: What factors shape these perceptions?

Sub-Question 2: What are the anticipated short and long-term impacts of study abroad?

Chapter 4

Methodology

Given the previously stated research questions, I have used the qualitative method of narrative inquiry to collect information regarding how students perceive that their experience abroad will impact their life. This section will explain the method of narrative inquiry in detail, as well as explain why I believe it is the most appropriate and effective method to conduct my research.

Project Description

The project I completed examines students' perceptions of the impacts of their study abroad experience. The objectives for my research include exploring a topic I am passionate about, learning more about individual students' experiences abroad and providing future students and faculty within study abroad programs a useful resource to analyze their own experiences. Given the nature of my research topic, qualitative methods are the most appropriate.

In "Democracy and Higher Education," the authors describe the method of narrative inquiry and the rationale behind using this method. The goal of this method is not to establish a statistically significant relationship, but rather to contribute to conversations about the topic. Given this goal, the approach of narrative inquiry focuses on the construction, interpretation and analysis of first-person narratives. Each person's transcript from their interview has been edited into a profile which provides a unique and expansive account of their experience abroad. (Peters, Alter & Schwartzbach, 2010). The method's focus on story-telling allows for interviewees to explore the dynamic nature of their own experiences and communicate naturally with the interviewer. Story-telling is a

universal human trait, across culture and throughout history, which people use to educate, communicate, persuade, connect and so on (Hsu, 2008).

I chose this method because the results are not generalizable, statistical information. These narratives include deep and detailed experiences of students who have studied abroad. Together, they will enhance the base of information about studying abroad, which will facilitate future program development and organization, encourage other students to study abroad and reiterate the importance of studying abroad to the global society.

Research Procedures

I developed my research project in light of Maxwell's *Qualitative Research Design* to ensure the success and quality of my research. To begin my research project, I worked through the purposes, context and questions for my research and these guided my selection of narrative inquiry. I chose a small, purposeful sample of five Penn State undergraduate students who have studied abroad. My study was cross-sectional, occurring at one point in time because I did not have the time to complete a longitudinal study (this would be beneficial for future research to explore). I interviewed students who have already completed study abroad programs because my study focuses more on the impacts of students' experiences abroad and students are only able to reflect on their experience after they have completed it.

I began my research by contacting current undergraduate students at Penn State who have studied abroad. I used purposeful sampling by selecting specific students to interview provide information that cannot be obtained as well from other choices. I chose five students who vary in major, gender, race and study abroad location. I decided that although I did not want a large, broad sample to make statistical conclusions, I did want a substantial variety of characteristics between the five students. Narrative inquiry is lengthy and time consuming, so I chose to interview only five students to ensure their profiles would be of the highest quality. I contacted each participant through email, since

I had a personal affiliation with each individual. Once I received each individual's signed consent form, I conducted the interview.

Each interview took place in a quiet study room in the Penn State library which I had reserved ahead of time after scheduling a time and date with each participant. Each interview was recorded on my cell-phone and then sent by email to be transcribed by an associate of my thesis adviser. After several weeks, I received all the transcripts and began editing each document into a profile. The editing process involved editing for grammar mistakes as well as arranging the document into a coherent and cohesive narrative. After I edited the profiles, I sent them back to each student for member-checking. I will explain the benefits of this approach in the next section. Once I received each student's edits and comments, I made appropriate revisions and then evaluated and cross-analyzed the profiles to understand how these students perceive the impact of their experience abroad.

Validity. There are two main concerns to the validity of my research that I would like to address. First, due to the potentially subjective nature of storytelling, there could be some misinterpretation of stories and perspectives. In order to combat this, I have used the method of member checks. After assembling each profile, I emailed the file to the respective interviewee to receive their feedback. Member checks is one of the best ways to rule out misinterpretation of what informants said and the perspective they have (Maxwell, 2005). Second, I have personal relationships with the participants I have interviewed. I believe this was helpful throughout the interviews because the participants felt more comfortable sharing stories with me, rather than a stranger. This enriched the information I obtained in the interviews. However, knowledge of the participants could have an impact on my interpretation of the data. The member checks address this potential threat to validity by ensuring proper interpretation of the interviews. Also, as I conducted the research, I followed professional interview protocols.

Strengths and Weaknesses. The main strength of the narrative inquiry method is the emphasis on story-telling. This method captures the personal and unique attributes of

each individual's study abroad experience. I have studied abroad twice and I found that talking with others about my experiences has been the primary way that I have processed what I learned, how I changed, what I want to do, what assumptions I made, how I relate to other cultures, and so many other aspects of the before, during and after stages of my experiences. The best way I have learned to relate to people is through story-telling. The ability to verbally transport someone to a place they have never been through descriptive words and images is an important skill. Through stories, we can learn about and better understand people we have never met or places we have never travelled to. I hope to use this study to personally learn more about other students' experiences abroad and to contribute documentation of individual narratives that will be valuable to the existing body of literature on studying abroad.

Weaknesses of this method must also be addressed. I have interviewed a small number of people, rather than surveying a large population. Many people assume that a thesis must have a conclusive answer to the research questions or a percent that proves the hypothesis. That is not the goal of my thesis. I have chosen to interview five students to ensure I could thoroughly analyze each profile within the context of my research questions. Each narrative provides different insights into the topic of study abroad and offers suggestions for future programs, students and faculty. This method is also time-consuming. As I conducted this research within a serious time constraint, I did not have time to comprehensively interview more than a small number of students. Overall, I believe that individual narratives will benefit the base of study abroad literature by providing documentation of actual lived experiences.

Chapter 5

Student Profiles

This section includes the data I have gathered, in the form of five student profiles. I have developed these profiles as a way to have each student present their stories and reflections on their time abroad. I will introduce the students in the order they appear in this section. Marvin Johnson studied abroad for a semester in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Monica Hershey studied abroad in Seville, Spain, for a summer program. Elliot Shibley traveled to Costa Rica for a week with a professor, participated in a summer program in Tanzania and studied abroad in Bonn, Germany, for a semester. Taoran Xie considers herself to be studying abroad for all four years at Penn State since she is from China and she also studied abroad in South Africa for a semester. Finally, Ericka Roberts studied abroad at Lincoln University in New Zealand for a semester.

A Juggling Act from Beginning to End

My name is Marvin Johnson. My major is Psychology with a business option. I have 3 minors which are more relevant when talking about Argentina and they are Spanish, International Studies, and Labor Studies and Employment Relations (LER). That's my whole gambit of knowledge. I'm from Doylestown, Pennsylvania. I am senior and an Honors Scholar also working through my thesis. I went to Argentina and was in Buenos Aires for 4 months, from March to the end of June of 2013.

Motivations

Intrinsic Factors. I would say I have a knack for traveling. When I was an 8th grader, I went to Guatemala for a mission trip and I had gone a few places in the south on missions too. I fell in love with the Spanish-speaking culture and that is something I've always enjoyed pursuing and exploring. I've been to Mexico and it's absolutely great. I have this weird love for Hispanic people in general which I guess comes with being a Spanish minor. Actually, I was a Spanish major when I signed up to go abroad, but that changed as my interests outside of college changed although I have always had a love for Hispanic culture. I always wanted to get outside of the boundaries of the U.S. and State College. I love being at home and in State College, but I'm not going to lie, I am the type of person that needs a change of scenery every now and then. I'm a person who likes to mix things up. It was a perfect way for me to get involved with something else and go somewhere different. I've never been to South America before so I figured this was definitely the time to do it, in case I didn't have that opportunity maybe in the future. When will I ever be able to go to Argentina again?!

Extrinsic Factors. First and foremost in a scholastic sense, there was a year between when I signed up for the trip and when I left. A lot changed, but when I signed up for it I was a dual major in Spanish and psychology. I could knock out most of my Spanish credits and I picked up the International Studies minor which I would be able to finish up

while abroad. Then I added a business option to my psych major and dropped my Spanish major down to a minor. This allowed me to wrap up my Spanish minor which was great, but at the same time I was able to pursue the business classes that applied for my business option as well as my LER minor. It took a lot of work to get that to fit in but it worked out really well for me. Then on top of all that, another extrinsic factor for me was definitely doing my best to be able to pick up the Spanish language. Becoming great at speaking Spanish was one of the things I was most focused on and worked the hardest for. It's been a dream for me to be able to speak Spanish and maybe one day become fluent. I'm still working on it, but the trip was a huge step for me.

The program was called IES which stands for the Institute for the International Education of Students. I had to look that up for my resume one time, it's really neat. They're a third party program, basically what they do is they bring students in from all over the country and then they have their own centers in different cities around the world. The centers are like their main headquarters, they bring in their own professors from that country to teach the students. They have classes in English, Spanish and a mix of both. They also partner with universities in the cities where you can directly enroll in classes. So some students mix. I took all of my classes at the study abroad center with the IES staff and the teachers they brought in. They brought in professors from the area, most of them were from Buenos Aires, but some were from the neighboring cities. They were all Argentine which allowed for us to benefit from their local knowledge and instruction without having to go to a different school.

There were a lot of other Penn State students because we were one of the biggest groups. There were a lot of students from the University of Michigan, University of Minnesota...a lot of people from the Midwest oddly enough. I made friends from all over. There weren't any Argentines in those classes, but obviously there were Argentine students in the universities IES partnered with.

I stayed in a home stay. I didn't get to choose a particular home stay although I did get to choose to live in a home stay rather than living in a dorm. I filled out a questionnaire that said what I wanted out of the experience. I got to choose whether I wanted to be treated as a family member or as a boarder. I said I wanted to be treated as a

family member and they definitely did that for me. Among other things, I said that I was allergic to cats and initially I got placed in a home with a cat but they switched me with another student. I found out midway through that I would have had his family and he would have had my family. It was fine; they did a really good job placing me and it was a really positive experience. I lived with the Sarmientos, which is a family of three. Jose and Blanca were my host parents and they were the nicest people in the world. My host brother was Jose Junior, I suppose, I didn't really know what to call him. He was about 30. The parents were probably in their late 50s. I lived downtown, about 30 blocks from the abroad center and it was just within range of walking. Usually I would walk through the city to get to my classes.

Stories

There are a lot of stories; in four months you pick up a lot of stories. I can think of one that was a really special moment for me with learning Spanish. Argentina had some of the best Italian food in the entire world and there was this pizza place we would go to called El Cuartito, which means the little room. It really was a little room and the pizza was out of this world. It must have been about midway through the trip, when my friend and I were having some pizza and beer and I remember we got this pizza called The Fugazetta. It was an enormous cheese pizza with the cheese coming out of every pore. We had gotten two pizzas and I had no idea how I was going to finish all the food. I remember the waiter coming up with a smirk on his face and it looked like he was thinking, "There is no way this kid is going to eat all this," and he comes up to me and says, "Buena suerte," which means good luck. I was joking around with the guy and tried to do my best but I couldn't finish it. I probably got down to like 2 slices which was a huge deal and I remember the guy coming up to me and I was just, like, "I tried, I'm sorry I let you down," in Spanish obviously. When he gave me the bill he shook my hand and said, "It was a pleasure serving you today." The whole exchange was in Spanish and it was this awesome moment of making someone else smile. I made someone laugh while speaking another language the whole time and even my friends didn't know what I said

to him. It just really clicked for me. You just have those days when you really click when you're living in another country where the people speak another language. Some days it's really hard, but some days it's really fluid and that was just one of those moments where I could make someone's day. It really showed that I have come a long way. I will always remember that.

Another thing about being in Argentina, it was a real struggle to be apart from my family, my friends and my girlfriend. I am the kind of person who absolutely loves to travel, but I have all these connections back home and my relationship was just really starting to take off, so it was hard to drop all of that and leave. I remember the second day there I was so homesick, and by the end of the first week I actually got sick. I had this stomach bug and I had to go to the hospital. The week after the first time I got sick, I fell ill once again and I thought, "I'm done. I want to go home right now." I wanted my mom to take care of me and I remember, I was in front of my host mom and I started crying. I just couldn't help it. She said, "We can change things...you can go home, if you want to go home." I was like, "I want to go home, but I don't want to go home. I'm supposed to be here, I want to be here." It was a huge struggle for me and I was putting a lot of pressure on myself with speaking the language and not giving myself any breaks. At the end of each day, I needed to cut out the Spanish, relax and recharge. It took me some time to realize that I had to go at my own pace.

I remember mid-way through the trip my parents came to visit me which starts another story. This is kind of a huge story. My parents came up in the middle of the trip and I had felt like I hadn't progressed a lot in Spanish. It seemed like I was never going to learn a lot or learn enough to be fluent. When my parents came, we took a plane to the other side of the country, to Mendoza, which is Argentina's wine country. We took a taxi to the airport and I was in the passenger seat, my parents were in the back seat, and the taxi driver was this really nice guy. All the taxi drivers in Argentina would love to talk and we had this really long conversation throughout the ride and my mom was recording the conversation in the back seat and later she said, "Son, I didn't know you could do that. You could never do that before you went to Argentina." I thought that was really cool. I gained the boldness to be able to go up to people and start speaking another

language. It was out of this world and really neat to make those connections...the jokes and the stories. The same guy drove us back when we finished our trip, so I got to see him again which was really neat. Argentines are amazing, really personable people who are willing to talk to you and share what's on their mind and not be afraid to tell you the honest truth. I love that. I love that about the Argentine people and the culture. Sometimes I miss that. I'm glad I had that experience and now, it's on to bigger and better things. I'd love to go back one day.

I got to see Messi play! It was the coolest thing ever and one of the most fun moments I want to share. There is this really neat website with suggestions if you're an American and feeling homesick. I would go to an American bar every now and then and I remember when I got a plate of Buffalo wings I was the happiest boy in the world and I tore them apart and it was such a taste of home. Another thing the site would do was have tours and they had a package for soccer, and I love soccer. They had bilingual guides and tickets available, you just had to buy the package which also included dinner- hot dogs and beer before the game. They would bus you out to the game and have seats together and the guides help you navigate through everything and take you back to the meeting point. It was one of the coolest things ever. It was the Argentine national team playing against Venezuela. What mattered the most was getting to watch Lionel Messi who is the best soccer player in the world. He is like the Michael Jordan of soccer, the best one to ever play the sport. Getting to do that was really special. I remember getting to see him score and the atmosphere and the energy is something that I will never forget. I would never have gotten that experience if I didn't go abroad.

Expectations and Outcomes

I never thought I would make so many amazing American friends. There were so many awesome people who helped get me through tough times. I had a pretty close group of friends that were from all over...Michigan, Wisconsin, Vermont, I mean we were pretty scattered. Once I found these people, we just clicked and it was so seamless. I genuinely miss these people. I had this one friend named Kelly. She was one of those

people who when we would get lunch and she would come to church with us, I would talk her ear off. She was probably sick of hearing me talk about my girlfriend and how much I missed her. But the two of us, we clicked! It was us and our group of friends who would travel the country together. We went to the North West to see the sights for the weekend during our break. Every day when I showed up at the center for class, we would all just start cracking up, telling stories and jokes and ridiculous stuff that happened in Argentina. Going into the trip, I expected to surround myself with all these Argentines. And that's great! That's what some people did and it was a great opportunity for them. But I didn't have that situation because I didn't have those classes with Argentines and I ended up making some amazing friends that I never thought that I would make. So, I guess I wish I had made more Argentine friends, but I don't regret anything because the American friends that I made were absolutely amazing. It was really great to form a community and we all still keep in touch.

Looking at other things that came out of the trip, I gained my own sense of Argentine pride which I never really expected. Like I said before, Argentines are not afraid to be honest, they're not afraid to be brutally honest, usually with their country and themselves. In America we have this attitude that we are the best country and everyone else sucks. For Argentines, they look at their country as something they love, but they recognize that there is work to be done. They should be stronger than they really are and more influential. They always thought of themselves as this country which has missed the mark for a long time. They have a realistic view and I learned from them that we need to strive for better in our own country. We need to strive for something better, search for something better. We are falling short on some things. They talk about their history in a very frank way. About 40 years ago, Argentina had a terrible dictatorship that involved torture, kidnapping and unspeakable atrocities. It's not something a lot of people know about. Some people don't know much about Argentina at all but I learned about something that happened so recently in the history of this country, something that is still in their minds, something that we discussed in all our classes, something that they weren't willing to let go of. The phrase they repeated was, "Nunca Mas," which means, "No more, never again." That was the slogan for moving forward from that dark period,

they weren't going to let it go because they wanted future generations to know that it should never be repeated. It was something that fascinated me.

I talked to my host parents about it and their experiences with it. It's one of those things where you know something about a person, a deep, dark, hidden thing from the rest of the world. Knowing something like that, you get closer to them and that is how I felt about Argentines, their psyche, where they come from and where they want to be. I couldn't help but embrace that culture. There are people that love to demonstrate and, I wouldn't call it protesting, but there would be a lot of demonstrations in the cities. I learned that Argentines do it right. My host parents told me the Brazilians were rioting over the World Cup, and it's rough what is happening there as the riots continue to happen as they build up for the World Cup and this world stage and the people themselves are being marginalized. But there were violent riots in Brazil and my host mom told me, "Brazilians don't know how to riot, we've been protesting for years." It's amazing to see because everyone knows what time it is, when it's going to take place and where it's going to be. At an exact moment, you will hear car horns honking and people banging on pans outside of their windows. I didn't take part in any of them, but some of my friends did and there would be women, children and old people in wheelchairs all there. People would come out for the love of their country and they would demonstrate this love, not anger, and at the same time recognize that change needed to happen. It was easy to get swept up in that love for Argentina after living there for 4 months. I didn't expect that I would feel more than, "Oh this is somewhere I lived for 4 months," but I did. I felt this is somewhere that became a part of who I am and I learned so much from it. I hope to take that with me in my life. So a huge result from my trip was my own sense of Argentine pride and the love I have for that country. A lot of people thought I was Brazilian when they saw me on the streets. Some people there thought that all black people are Brazilian so I thought that was funny. But it was really great to have a second home.

My experience has become a part of my life in ways I never thought it would. Being in Argentina has been part of my development into a man and some personal epiphanies. The first time I ever went grocery shopping on my own was in Argentina.

Which was crazy because it was all in another language on top of the fact I had no idea what to buy myself. I figured out what cheese goes bad and when I should start throwing things out. A lot of things people learn when they start college, I learned in another country. I remember one huge thing that I didn't expect was enjoying the little things and the realizing the little victories mean so much. I remember the first time that I got my laundry done. They have laundry services in the city where you take your clothes, drop them off, give them your name and say that you want them washed and dried and then they tell you when to come back and get them. The first time I was freaking out. I met a guy at the laundry service place and he asked my name and if I wanted them washed and dried. It was all in Spanish and I was focusing on getting through it. I said to him something that literally translated into, "I'm sorry, it's my first time," and he said, "Don't worry about it." Looking back on it a few weeks later, what I said to him, "Es mi primera vez," is commonly said to mean, "My first time I have ever had sex." So when I said that to the guy, he started chuckling and by the end of my trip they knew my name. Being there in that moment, I was so happy to get my laundry done and have this exchange. That is a great example of two things I never expected to learn in Argentina; to enjoy the little things and not to be afraid to laugh at yourself when you make mistakes, because I made mistakes all the time. There was never a day in Argentina in the 120 days I was there when I spoke Spanish perfectly all day. I learned to see the big picture; that I was communicating with people and understanding what they are saying to me and they are understanding what I am saying to them. My host parents would say it's not about being grammatically correct, it's about communicating.

Regarding my personal growth and the things I had to do. I had to go through customs about 6 times to get my visa sorted out. Argentina is a very laid-back country and I remember the first time we sat down with a therapist on the program. She said we could come to her if we ever needed help with anything. She explained some ways the culture would be different than what we were used to. One of the things she said was, "You can expect to do 4 or 5 things in a day in Argentina and only get one of them done. That's just how we are as Argentines. As Americans you hate that." I went crazy after going to the visa office literally 4 or 5 times, when I should have only had to go twice.

That was a challenge, but I stepped up to it. That is part of being a man and taking care of things. You get to scheduled appointments on time even though the other person may not and you just have to live with that.

I keep talking about my own personal development and I guess I never expected this trip as a having a part in that, I only saw it as the next stepping stone. I got more than I ever could have imagined. I wasn't expecting many of these outcomes, and they definitely kept things interesting. While I didn't expect so much novelty in the personal aspects of my experience, I definitely expected something different by living in another country. I knew it would be different and I loved that it was. I'm the kind of person that gets bored with the same thing. After a while, I need to mix things up and all these new experiences with new people helped me keep things interesting and spice things up. I was never bored with Argentina, although there were some days when I would be sick of it, it definitely never bored me.

Goals. It's funny when people ask me, "Are you fluent? Can you speak Spanish fluently?" The one thing I learned when you are picking up a second language is that it's a lifetime of learning and it takes a lifetime to perfect. I know I am far from the point of perfecting my Spanish, but in terms of fluency and being able to go up and hold your own in a conversation, I can definitely say I have reached that point. In Argentina it was something where, it was hard but you had to train yourself whenever someone comes up to you or you go up to someone they are going to start speaking to you in Spanish and you should be ready to listen and be prepared to say something back. We don't think about it in English because it's our first language, because we just react, it's something that's natural. When speaking another language, you have to physically think about the potential things someone may say to you and what you might say back. I had to think about that before I even started each conversation. Eventually, as I became more comfortable, I could react more easily. That was the point of fluency I reached and I hope to hold on-to it.

I went to Argentina with learning Spanish as my main priority. I thought, "I don't care who I hang out with or what I learn, I need to put myself in the best position to learn

Spanish.” If I needed to surround myself with Argentines and put myself in those situations, then that was what I was going to do. That was the most important thing. A lot of people go abroad now and sample the culture but don’t learn anything about the place or the language. That wasn’t the experience I wanted. I wanted to focus on my goal. I decided this a year before I actually left. I had to change my Spanish major down to a minor in Spanish and I switched programs within IES to a less rigorous program. I didn’t take any classes in the partner universities, so I wasn’t surrounded by Argentines, I was surrounded by other American students, granted they were also learning Spanish. When I got there I had this mentality of Spanish all day, every day and I got burnt out so quickly. I was getting frustrated, homesick, angry and worn out at the end of the day. I realized that I needed to take time to speak English, because that was who I am. I’m the kind of person who talks a lot and it was hard for me to have to engage in the mental exercise of speaking a second language because I had a limited vocabulary and couldn’t always properly express myself. I needed to have some time to speak English. So that’s what I began doing. I would speak English with my friends more than Spanish throughout the trip. It allowed me to be more relaxed and then when I wanted to speak Spanish one on one and with my host parents, I could. They spoke great English but sometimes I preferred to speak Spanish with them. I would even speak Spanish with my friends every now and then or sometimes we would speak Spanglish. I realized it wasn’t always about immersing yourself completely. Otherwise, it was going to make me crazy.

It was funny because I wasn’t the only one that spoke English around the abroad center in the common area where we would hang out. We were on the 12th and 13th floor of a high rise building downtown and there were common areas which were surrounded by classrooms. In the common areas we would all hang out and the staff and teachers would see us obviously and there was one week where they said it was a Spanish-only week because they had heard us talking in English too much. They would police us for the first two days but if we didn’t follow it, they would just let it go. At least for me, I needed that time to speak English. Did it hurt me in learning Spanish? I’m not sure, but it kept me sane and I still learned so much. Someone could look at my situation and think I didn’t learn anything. If you were just watching for a day, you might only see us speaking

English. But in reality, we learned so much. I think a great example would be that we were there for a really long time. They had a summer program which came in around two and half months into our program and they left about a month earlier than we did. They were probably there for a few weeks. They had their own cliques and spoke Spanish all the time. But for us, we had a balance and we noticed that we spoke much better than they did. We definitely were there longer, so we had the luxury of being surrounded by it. We were there so long that we didn't need to speak Spanish the entire time, but maybe that's what the summer program students needed to do.

Challenges. Going home was never an option for me. I think first and foremost I knew I could, but it was never an option in my mind. I think what really helped me stick it out, especially in the beginning, was my faith. When I got to my home stay and met my host parents for the first time they made me a little lunch, and I went in my room and started playing worship music on my computer. It brought me home, it brought me back to my home church, to the community that I love, to the friends that I have at home and it kept me going. It kept me going even during the days when I would miss my girlfriend so much it would hurt. It was something where, before I left I told my mom that if things worked out with my girlfriend Abby, I was going to marry her. It wasn't just puppy love; it was something serious and being so many miles apart was brutal, really brutal. One of my friends from my campus ministry at Penn State was in my program in Argentina and she and I would go to church every week together. It was great. Church was out in the suburbs, and we would take a bus to the train station and then take the train to go outside the city. We went to an international church, where the congregation was made up of foreigners and the service was in English. I grew up in the suburbs, so the combination of going to church in the suburbs and hearing English did wonders for me since my typical day in Argentina involved Spanish and city life. It refocused me for the week, and I needed to make sure that I held onto my faith while I was in Argentina. I'm not going to lie to you, it was essential for me to have faith that this was where God was telling me to be; that this was where I was meant to be in my spiritual journey. I knew I was going to grow from this, in spite of it being hard. Walking to the bus those Sundays, I would listen

to worship music and more times than not, for a good month or so, I would just cry to myself. People probably thought I was crazy, considering it was early in the morning in Argentina and the only people that were out on the streets were homeless people. So they probably thought I was crazy. But it was an amazing experience; I was relying on God to get me through this experience and at the same time appreciating the blessing of being in Buenos Aires. There was that dichotomy of missing home, realizing all the things that I have been blessed with and also recognizing the blessing that I was living right then and being mindful of that, in the moment. It was a juggling act from beginning to end. But it was absolutely worth it, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Meaning and Significance

Short-Term Impacts. When you talk to someone and they are speaking another language to you, you have to be ready to listen and ready to think about what you're going to say before you say it. Something that really stuck with me after the trip was when people would ask me, "So how's your Spanish?" I wanted to say that it wasn't just my Spanish that improved, it was my ability to listen, and think about what I was going to say before I said it. Along those lines, listening and thinking like that was necessary in Argentina, but even now that I am home, I communicate differently. When I'm holding someone's attention or when I'm talking too much, I am more cognitive about that. I try to avoid talking just for the sake of talking. Words have gained more value for me. Now that I am back in the United States, it's sort of a habit.

Speaking Spanish also stuck with me when I got back too. When I would go out to lunch with my family those first few weeks when I was back in the United States, I was ready to talk to the waiter in Spanish. I had a little script embedded in my head so I had to try and shake that off. That was an immediate impact from my experience, but that made it really nice when I did run into someone that spoke Spanish. When I moved into my new apartment at school, the whole property was being landscaped. Many of the landscapers were Hispanic so I would walk out of my apartment and start speaking Spanish to the guy who was right in form of my house. I thought that was really neat, to

offer them water and speak their language. It's not something I get to do as much, but I didn't want to let go of speaking Spanish. I was on a double date a couple of weeks ago at a Mexican restaurant and I couldn't help but order in Spanish. The waiter made a joke at me in Spanish and maybe he thought I didn't understand Spanish, but I knew exactly what he said. So, speaking and listening was something that was an immediate impact and just this lingering desire to speak Spanish. I would speak it to myself, because I was just so used to it and I didn't want to stop. I would speak Spanish to my family and my parents didn't understand a darn word I said to them, but I needed it because it was something that was part of my everyday life when I was in Argentina

I think that my experience abroad is influencing my relationship with Abby, who is now my fiancé. I appreciate being around her so much. It was really hard not being able to contact her or see her for 4 months. I think it helped me to see how valuable our relationship is to me and how difficult it was to be away from her. So now, I need to appreciate the little moments. We had lunch just before this interview and it may seem simple for most people, but even just a lunch means so much more to me because there were some days when I missed her so much it hurt.

Now I appreciate the little things about being home, like the friends that I have. I have friends in Argentina who never wanted to leave, never wanted to go back to their families. It was hard to see that. I had friends that would get mad at me when I would say how much I missed being home and it showed me how much my family means to me. I was so sad when my parents left to go back to the states and I still had half way to go. I have the best parents in the world. Coming back from Argentina really helped me to see that. I missed them so much and they were part of the reason I wanted to come back and other people didn't have that.

Looking more at how my experience has affected me, I have become a huge proponent for studying abroad and I have worked with IES as a student ambassador. I was nominated for the position and they sent me an email a couple of weeks afterwards and I accepted it. I have actually worked with IES staff from their headquarters in Chicago and then they came up for the study abroad fair here at Penn State. I worked with them for probably 4 hours even though I was expecting I would only be there for 1

or 2. The whole time I was there I was talking with tons of people and making sure everything flowed well. The woman I was working with saw me talking to all these people and she said to the IES people, “You should really hire this guy full time.” It shows the kind of passion I have for talking and sharing with people. So, I know you’re in the middle of working on a multi-cultural thesis and that’s why I wanted to share my experience with you, because it is still impacting me.

One lesson I learned is that perfection is overrated. As Americans we are so hard on ourselves. We need to have everything when and how we want and need it. Gosh, I learned from the locals to be laid-back when I lived in Buenos Aires and people living in the city are considered uptight among Argentines. When I was in the smaller cities, they had siestas for a couple of hours in the middle of the day and all the stores shut down, the whole town shuts down. That helped me not to sweat the small things in life and recognize how stupid I look when I’m stressed out. One of the things my professors noticed about American students was that we had a drive; we needed the A, the due date and the outline of everything we were supposed to do. That is not how it works in Argentine schools. My aunt is working on her PhD in educational leadership. For one of her projects she had to work with someone from another country, so I connected her with my marketing professor back in Argentina whom I was very close with. One thing he said to me was, “American students look at the student-teacher relationship as a professional relationship. Students approach professors regarding assignments looking to know exactly what is expected of them to get the grade they want. Assignments aren’t very structured in Argentina and grades aren’t as heavily emphasized as they are in the U.S.” That resonated with me because I think it is just so silly. Part of that is just the way the educational system is and the other part of that is you can’t freak out about grades. You know we put so much emphasis into getting an A as opposed to getting a B, but at the end of the day, what does this exam mean to me in the grand scheme of my life? What is this project going to do to my happiness? If it starts to drive me crazy, then it is already taking my happiness.

For some people, that will impact them in the future. So you need to remember to laugh at yourself and not take life so seriously. That's a South American sort of thing, you can't take life too seriously or it's going to kill you.

Long-Term Impacts. I want to give myself some time before I say anything about how this shaped my future, and how it will shape where I am going in life. Taking things in stride comes naturally to me now and it has been woven into all my stories and experiences. Big changes are going to happen. I'm getting married this coming summer, I'm graduating, I'm going to be finding work, find a place to live and moving out of my house. This could easily stress someone the heck out, but for me after going to Argentina, I realize it's all about taking things in stride. I learned that even if the given situation involves drastic change, it doesn't have to change your faith in your own path. I have faith that God already has a path set out for me.

You asked earlier how I relied on my faith. I trust in something bigger than me and I don't need to micromanage every facet of my life. I know that is going to come into play as these imminent future situations start unfolding. I see them and I'm ready to take them head on. I'm ready to be a leader in my marriage and I'm ready to be bold in new situations. I guess that's part of it, not knowing what's coming in the future. I felt that on the airplane when I was going to Argentina, this country that I had never been to before. Part of me didn't want to go, part of me did, and I survived that inner turmoil and recognized that there is no room for worrying. I can't stop these things from happening so I have to enjoy them and not resist them. As I grow up, I need to be able to share with others and connect with others about where I come from. That's what will shine through. There are major moments in your life and you need to seize them. You need to appreciate them and you can't be afraid of them. I was so scared going to Argentina but it has done so much for me and it was such a blessing for me to be there.

Be Part of the Culture, Not in Your Own Bubble

I'm Monica Hershey. I'm from Quarryville, in Lancaster County Pennsylvania. I'm a junior at Penn State and I studied abroad this past summer for six and half weeks in Seville, Spain. My major is Nutrition with a minor in Spanish. I picked the program because with my major, that was the only time that I could go without having to graduate late. I was looking at summer programs for Spanish since I knew that it would work towards my academic goals and there were only a select few that I could do during summer with Spanish. A lot were through CIEE...I forget what that stands for. But, I think there was one in Madrid that I could go to. There was one in Seville, obviously. There was one in Palma de Mallorca. Another was in Madrid but I didn't want to go to Madrid because I knew that they spoke English there and I wanted to try and get better at Spanish. So I narrowed it down to Palma de Mallorca and Seville. And Palma de Mallorca was really expensive and the time periods you could do it for were not what I wanted or it didn't work out in my summer, or something like that. So I chose Seville. But I wanted to go there, it wasn't like, "Oh I guess I'm going to Seville." I was excited about it! There might have been another place that was in South America or Latin America, but I didn't go there obviously. That is mostly why I chose it, just to get the most authentic Spanish experience.

Motivations

I really wanted the experience. I had heard so many great things about studying abroad. Everyone's like, "when you go to college, you have to study abroad. Like I went to Prague. It was amazing." I definitely wanted the experience and I had never been out of the country before. I wanted to improve my Spanish and I had learned so much about Spain in my high school Spanish class. I wanted to go there and it was the prime time opportunity...why not summer, I don't have anything else to do. It all fit together really well.

Intrinsic Factors. I have always been really interested in other cultures and I'd never been anywhere. I wanted to learn more about the world and experience new things and meet different people. I've been around the United States and that's interesting, but I just thought it would be interesting to be submerged into a culture that was completely foreign, and have to fend for myself. Studying abroad is, I think, a really good way to do that. Obviously, if you go and travel around the world by yourself or with friends and family, you're going to experience the world in different ways. But I think studying abroad is really cool because, I got to have so many experiences. There were all these trips planned and we constantly had guides that would teach us all this stuff, stuff I would never know on my own if I went to Seville as a tourist. You know, you're learning from Spaniards. I went to be a part of the culture, to observe and sort of try to blend in. I think my intrinsic desire to see the world and learn more about other cultures was a big factor.

Extrinsic Factors. The organization is called CIEE. Basically I thought it was going to be with students from all over the country. Which it was, but apparently, CIEE is really heavily promoted at Penn State. That's how I found out about it because it's all over the Penn State study abroad website. I went to a meeting before we left Penn State in May or April. There were 40 of us in the room and I was thinking, "How big is this program?" I was expecting to go there and see 200 people because there were 40 people from Penn State, so there would probably be 40 people from every one of the other schools. But then I got there and there were only 15 people from all other schools. So there were a ton of people from Penn State, which was really fun but there were other students too. The program was set up so that you could go in 3 week increments, or sessions, I guess. The first session was from May 15th to the first week of June. The second session was from the first week of June to the end of June. The third session ended in the third week of July. Each session was three weeks long plus half a week for orientation in the beginning of the week. Then you could pick a course you wanted to take for the 3 weeks. You had class in the morning from about 10 to 1. For three weeks, I got 3 credits for each of those classes. So, it was awesome. You had choices of some classes you could take, but you had to talk in Spanish and only certain topics transferred to Penn State.

CIEE has a study center in the city of Seville. I had to walk there from my home stay. For CIEE, you stay in home stays, you can't stay in a dorm, or something like that. You could pick if you wanted to stay with a señora, so you would stay with one woman or anyone else who might have space. Or, you could pick to live with a family and a family means a couple, people with kids, people with old kids, young kids, you could pick whatever you wanted. I opted for the family version, because I thought, "That will be fun!" I liked being part of a family. So, let's see, the program had a lot of weekend trips. They had a day trip during each session and a weekend overnight trip for each session. They planned the trips around Andalucía mostly and this other region of Spain.

Overall, I honestly felt the program was good just because they had so many activities planned, all the time. They always had ideas for things we could do and places we could go. For the first four days, we had orientation guides who toured us around the city. They taught us how to use the metro, how to use the bike system, how to use the restaurants, and took us to all these great places. I thought it was so great, because I had no idea how to use anything. I ended up never using the metro because I could walk everywhere but it was nice they showed us how in case I wanted to go somewhere. They gave us the background on the city which I thought it was really great. Their trips were really awesome.

All the staff at the CIEE center were Spanish. I think one woman was from the US, but she had moved to Spain. The classes were all taught by people that lived in Seville. In terms of the course content, a lot of times the classes would go on trips during the day, around the city to help us relate what we were learning to our environment. I think they did a really good job and it was very well organized. They gave us a lot of opportunities to do as much as possible; at the study center they helped us be a part of the culture and not our own little bubble.

Stories

I celebrated my birthday during my study abroad. Ok, this is so exciting! It's my birthday, I woke up and took a shower and I went back to my room and got ready. My

host mom would always sort of walk by my room but not look in the door when it was time for breakfast, and she would just say, "You can have breakfast if you want. It's on the table." So I would. But this time, she knocked on my door and came into my room. A week earlier I had gone shopping downtown in the city and I bought a dress from this store and it was so cute. She thought it was so beautiful, so she came into my room with a bag from that store and she said, "Happy Birthday," and gave me the bag. It wasn't wrapped or anything fancy but she got me a shirt from that store for my birthday. I was so touched, I kept thinking this is just so nice, and it was a great shirt, I would've never picked it out for myself. She was great, so sweet. That was the start of my day then I had breakfast, went to class, and hung out with my friends. We went by the river during the day to tan.

Then at night, my host family said we were going out to dinner for my birthday. And my host mom said that the whole family was going to be there. My host family had 4 kids; the oldest daughter, a son, another daughter, and then another son. The oldest daughter had just gotten married, she was like 30 and I hadn't met her husband before because she didn't live in the house anymore. Then the youngest daughter had a boyfriend who I had never met before, because they don't bring their boyfriends home, and he was going to be there too. I was so excited and it was just so nice. We got in their car and because I just walked everywhere, I didn't really know how they got around. I knew they had a car and my host brother had a moped sort of thing.

Me, my host mom and dad and my youngest host brother got in the car and everyone else was like, "We'll meet you there." We drove for a while, got to the restaurant and it was all outside and just perfect. It was probably like 9:30 at night, so I was starving. We were sitting there, waiting for everyone else to come. They took forever, time is not even a thing there. But they said they would meet there at probably 9 or 9:30. We got there late, too. I was ready, sitting on the couch ready to go, probably a half hour before everyone else was ready to go. They said we were going to leave at 9 and we didn't leave until an a half an hour later. At the restaurant, they were all talking and asking me questions about the Amish and other things, which was kind of funny. But then eventually everyone showed up except for my youngest host sister's boyfriend, so I

never met him. Everyone else was there, which was really nice. I thought it was very nice that they all came for my birthday. They didn't even really know me that well.

We got so much food. We got all these platters and it was so funny to experience dining out with actual Spaniards, because they are so casual and laid back. It was just like, "Yea, we'll have another plate of fried calamari." You order what you want but then they are like, "We want this now! We'll take this!" You know what I mean, it's really funny. They kept getting all this food, it was so good. The whole thing was so nice, I felt like I was a part of their little family. It was towards the end of my study abroad so I felt like I was able to get close to them. It was really fun too, because they were just like a family arguing, and all that stuff. The mom was like, "Now she said this, and he's upset because she is doing this..." so it was really funny. I felt like a part of their family for an hour. Then I went back and hung out with my friends by the river again because you go out with a bang when it's your birthday. It was a great birthday in Spain. That's my story.

Expectations and Outcomes

Before we went abroad, CIEE gave us a 50 page information packet with stuff like, bring slippers because they don't walk around in their bare feet, and make sure you know that when people say they are coming at 9 they really mean 9:30. But it's so much different to expect something than to experience it. You can read about it but it's different when you actually need to get somewhere a half hour late, because you're not going to get there on time. I'm trying to think of what else...they told us about the big families and how some kids stay home till they are 30 years old. I know it's normal there, but it was interesting to actually live with a "kid" who is 28 and still lives with their parents. I learned new things and they learned from me too. I was like, "This is weird you guys, you need to move out. ASAP!" But it was a good experience. I can appreciate it obviously, it's nice to experience a different culture, because it's not going to be the same as what you're used to. And I liked walking everywhere.

Everyone that goes abroad and is like, “Oh my gosh, you know my host family and I email all the time and we talk about blah, blah, blah.” Going into the trip, I expected I would have this grand entrance and everyone was going to be like, “Oh, the American student is here!” But, with my host family I always would eat alone in the kitchen which I think partly was because my host mom tried to cater to my needs. Some nights she would just feed me a frozen pizza because I think she thought I would rather like to have a frozen pizza than whatever they were having for dinner. Or because all our schedules were off, which they kind of were, the kids were always coming and going. I expected there to be more of a family aspect to me living with an actual host family. It was great but it definitely wasn’t one of those experiences where I would be like, “I totally love my host family and I’m going to visit them next week,” type of thing. It was good to stay with them but I wish I would’ve been closer to them.

Let’s see, what else. The time schedule for eating really threw me off because I expected that I’d adjust to this new eating schedule, but I ended up eating like 6 meals a day because I could not adjust. I would eat breakfast at home and then lunch was at 3. I had to eat in between meals! In between class, I would run to this little convenience store down the street and then go back to class. Dinner was at 10, so I had to eat between 3 and 10. It was so hard, I could never adjust. I assume they had snacks, but I’m not even sure they did. But, that was hard. I was expecting that to happen, but it was different to experience it.

The weather, oh the weather! The weather and the clothing. They told us, well first of all they told us in the summer it’s like 100 degrees all the time or more. I packed mostly tank tops, dresses, skirts; dress nice but dress cool. I only brought a hoodie for my warm clothes, and that was it. And the first two weeks we were there, they were like, “it never rains in Seville,” and it rained 5 times! It was cold and we were miserable. I had one pair of jeans that I had to wear for two weeks, because my host mother was doing my laundry, but I didn’t know when. So it was really cold in the beginning but then it did get really, really hot. That was something to adjust to also because I like the heat, but it was over 100 some days; it was 109 one day. I had to walk everywhere and by the time I got to class I’d be dripping in sweat.

I was very confused sometimes because I swear people were just walking around in suits and I was like, “Where are you headed?” I was happy to not be wearing a suit because it was so hot. All the men were wearing black long sleeved, long pant, suits and my host mother would wear long sleeves. Everyone was wearing long sleeves and all this clothing and I thought, “I can’t deal with that, it’s too hot!” I guess they say long skirts are supposed to keep you cooler, but it was still interesting. I expected that too, but it was extremely hot and I didn’t pack appropriately.

Another thing I noticed, is how young the US is as a country. I realize this is obvious but I never thought about it. The US is so young in terms of development and in Spain I was surrounded by all the history from so long ago; they were talking about years B.C. like Roman Rule. We visited an abandoned Roman city that was on the outskirts of Seville. We went there and everything was so cool and from so long ago, you don’t see that kind of history anywhere, or in the United States. I thought that there was so much history, so much to learn and Spain is much cooler than we are.

I think it’s definitely worth noting or realizing that it’s so much better to experience things. We read things all the time and think we can relate to worldly issues, or things where you’re not actually experiencing it. It’s so much different to experience it, even if you’re ready for something. I thought I was ready to study abroad. I was not prepared for everything I was going to have to experience and I think that demonstrates the importance of experiencing things rather than just reading or learning about things. Looking at things and actually experiencing them makes a world of difference. In high school, we learned a lot about Spain, and I went to some places that we talked about. Going to those places was like, “Oh my gosh, I learned about this,” but it’s so much cooler now that I’m here and can actually see and experience it. I learned about it from people who are from there and combined their knowledge with what I’ve learned. I still think learning about things is really great; I learned so much about Seville before I went, I did my research but then when I got there I expected some of it but I didn’t expect a lot of it. It’s just better to experience it, which is why studying abroad is so great, because it changes your perspective on everything. It definitely has an impact.

I went into the trip wondering what kind of impact it was going to have on me. I wish I didn't know what was going to change afterwards, but I was expecting it to have some sort of lasting impact. Or that I would gain a different point of view. Afterwards when I came back to the US I hated a lot of things. I appreciated some things but the thing about Spain was that it made me want to go to a lot more places and experience them to gain a new perspective. I think everyone should experience that at some point. Before I went I expected a new point of view on certain things, I didn't know what, and then when I came back I realized I have gained a new appreciation of some things and then began to hate other things.

One of the main things I gained was a new point of view and an appreciation for different cultures. I had an intercambio who was a Spanish graduate student who I was paired up with to help them learn English and so I could learn Spanish. We only met up twice because it was hard for us to find a time we could meet. But it was really nice and thought-provoking to hear and learn from someone that is practically the same age as me. I was able to hear and learn from her and other people in Seville about their lives which was extremely meaningful. It meant so much more to learn from those people rather than learning from a tour guide or a YouTube video or something. You could connect and get to know someone's personal perspective and see how Seville affects them verses how Seville affects you. Obviously when I was there I was thinking, "Everything is great, everything's exciting!" and then you get to hear what they think. Of course they still like Seville too, but they can provide you with something maybe you didn't think about and then you realize not everything is perfect. It was a really significant thing for me just because I love learning from different personal and cultural perspectives. You can study abroad and still learn a lot and have a great experience if you go with an American professor, maybe it depends if they have lived there or they have a new perspective too. I really appreciated the new perspective I got based on who I was learning from and what they have experienced. It differs based on who you learn from but I really appreciated my intercambio.

Goals. My goal to submerge myself in the culture led me to do all the activities. The activities weren't mandatory and a lot of people choose not to do them, and I was like "You're crazy, I already paid for this, what are you doing?" I went on all the trips and tried to have as many of the cultural experiences that were offered to me. I also tried to do things that I had heard about, so I went to a Flamenco show and paddle boated on the river. We went to a lot of the local bars and restaurants that weren't touristy. I made friends who had similar goals and that helped influence me to do all the trips and go to all the authentic places. I also wanted to travel and the first class I took we traveled and hiked in northern Spain. That was cool and also helped me reach my goal of seeing as much as possible. That was a trip with a class and it was a great learning experience but also fun! Then I went to Madrid for a personal travel choice just to visit. I think that my goal was achieved as much as I could have achieved it in six and a half weeks.

Speaking Spanish was a harder goal because I was nervous. I thought I was so bad at speaking that I didn't even want to speak to anyone. Reaching the goal to become better at Spanish was challenging. Since I was with a bunch of American students, we rarely talked in Spanish with each other. We would say, "We should talk in Spanish you guys," and then we barely ever did. You could encounter and talk to as many Spanish people as you wanted. When I met with my intercambio, I had the choice of whether I wanted to have an interpreter or make an effort to talk to her and try to improve my Spanish. I chose the latter and even though we only met a couple times, it helped me and I made that effort. When we went out we would usually just talk to our friends and wouldn't really socialize with the Spaniards. When we went out to dinner I was never the first one to say, "We'd like this!" because we didn't know how to say, "We would like" for about three weeks. Plus, the dialects are different over there. What you learn in Spanish class is so dumb compared to what people actually speak because you just learn general things. For the first two weeks there we were saying completely wrong phrases. We thought it was right based on what we had learned, but we were completely wrong. Our guide kept telling us, "Don't say that, say this instead." We were like, "What does that even mean? We never learned that." It was discouraging that everything we learned was all a lie, or not applicable. That was definitely the hardest goal to reach.

Challenges. The language barrier was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. I still learned a lot based on the fact that I literally could not communicate with anyone. I felt I was like really low on the Spanish-speaking scale, out of all the students studying abroad. I felt I was lost too, because I could understand what was being said, but then I couldn't get people to understand me. By the end, I could pretty much understand what everyone was saying, but couldn't necessarily respond in the most appropriate way... I definitely didn't expect it to be that hard.

Once I got more comfortable, I talked to my host mom. Also, talking with my host sister was good because she didn't really ever speak to me in English. She's an English teacher in Spain but she refused to talk to me in English. Sometimes she would speak to me in English if she was trying to explain something. If she was talking to me in Spanish and I didn't know a word, she would say, "It's like "grapes." I would be like, "Oh ok." That did actually happen to me one time; I didn't just pull that out of thin air. She would help me sometimes, but it was extremely rare when she talked to me in English. They mostly all wanted me to learn in Spanish. Which is good. I would watch a soap opera almost every day with my host mom. That helped a little bit. In the beginning I had no idea what the heck was going on in the soap opera, I didn't know what everyone was saying. By the end of my trip, I could understand most of it. It was really exciting. I still watch it sometimes on the internet. Those were my goals and I think they were achieved; the only hurdles were comfort zones, speaking Spanish and familial interactions with my host family.

Meaning and Significance

Short-Term Impacts. I think I gained a whole new point of view and not that I wasn't before, but I have become more open to new ideas and people. This trip definitely changed my perspectives and views on the United States. In certain ways, we are very wasteful. There were things I realized that I appreciated about America while I was over there. Even with the time, I appreciate that in the US 1:30 means 1:30. But I also

appreciate how laid back and fun everyone is in Spain. That is better than an uptight life. I have actually been a lot more late this year and I am never, never late. But I've been late; I've just been more laid back. I think it's given me an appreciation for different cultures. I think I've become more invested in more global things that I didn't really care about before because this experience helped me realize how oblivious I was to most other cultures. You hear about stuff on the news but that's not actually the same as caring about something or desiring to know more. Let's see, I haven't talk about food. They have a lot of good food there. A lot of it was sort of similar to the United States but then some stuff was totally different.

I noticed something immediately, when I was flying back to the US. I flew into Chicago from Madrid. Well first, when I flew to Spain, I got to the Madrid airport, they stamped my passport and I went to Seville. No security, no nothing...pretty much. When I got back to Chicago and had to go through all the customs, it was so annoying. They were interrogating me and I was like, "I'm from this country, just let me in!" Everyone was so obnoxious, I will never forget, I was so annoyed with everyone. I didn't know if people were like this in Spain and I just tuned them out because they were speaking Spanish. I was excited to come back to the US and see my family, but that experience in the airport irritated me.

I noticed that they are less wasteful or maybe just in different way. I've done better now at washing my clothes, I mean it's good to wash your clothes obviously, but they re-wear the same outfit all the time. Here, you shouldn't wear the same outfit within the span of like two and a half weeks. It's wasteful to wash your clothes, all the water and energy it uses. They line-dry their clothes. I obviously can't do that in State College but I noticed that they weren't as wasteful, which made me reflect on my own wasteful practices. Those were just some little things I noticed.

Long-Term Impacts. They put a lot of value on family there. I put a lot of value on my family too, but being a part of their family whether I felt very included or not, just being there and knowing that family is such a big deal for them was impactful. Since they have such big families and everything, while being there and away from my family, it gave me

a new or extra appreciation for my family and those types of values. In my host family, the oldest sister would go grocery shopping all the time with my host mom and I thought, "That is so fun, nobody does that when they are grown up with their mom, that's so nice." I've always had a good relationship with my family and they have always been really important to me, but in the future, I'm going to carry that out. I think seeing my host family while I was away from my family gave me an appreciation for how close they were. In the future, I would want for my family to be really close. I was always just going to have a small family, but now I want a big family, it's so much more fun!

I think the global awareness I gained could have an impact on my future career. I think that it's something I want to pursue and this helped me think more about it. Also, openness to new people and ideas is something that is always good to have; you can apply that all the time. I come from a place where everyone is conservative, everyone's white and it's a pretty stereotypical farm town. It is good for me to have gained this perspective because you really aren't taught it, or you aren't really forced to experience it. I think there was one African American in my graduating class and two Hispanics. I have gone and visited other cultures in the US and I think whatever you get to do on a mission trip or a study abroad experience will give you a new perspective which can be carried throughout your life, and influence the decisions you make, your openness to the people around you and what they have to say and their opinions.

Looking back, I regret not staying for longer so I would definitely go back someday. The whole time I was there I wanted to bring everyone with me. I want to show my parents what I was talking about in all my emails and I want to share the experience. Someday I hope that I will go back and I wrote my host mother a really long letter when I left and I was like, "I'm coming back and I will be seeing you, and I have your phone number and your address so hopefully you are still living here." I hope I can go back but I wonder when that will be. I want to do so much more travelling around Spain and Europe and other places too. I wish I could have travelled more there because I was so close to everything. It was hard to get there but it was really great and I am so glad I got to do it. It was the only time I could and it all worked out. God was on my side. It was great!

Climbing Waterfalls...Definitely Worth It

My name is Elliot Shibley, I am a 5th year landscape architecture and geography dual major. Some of the places I've been include Costa Rica, which was only for a week, and Tanzania, for six weeks as a study abroad, and Germany for 4 months as a study abroad in the spring of 2013.

Motivations

Intrinsic Factors. I have a strong interest in geography and that innately drives my desire to see the world. In terms of my personality, I am someone that sees the bigger picture and I think, as a geographer, I wanted to go abroad and see firsthand how cultures interact and how different people live their lives. Not through movies or documentaries or reading. You need to live it. There is some stuff you can't get from watching and reading that you can only get from interacting with people every day. Like at a café, ordering coffee and seeing how other people live their lives. It's just so different. You can do that in the US as well, you just have to get outside the bubble.

Nature has always intrigued me. I have always been a man of nature, always been drawn to nature. It wasn't studying abroad but one of the things that probably started my interest in nature was Yellowstone National Park and Yosemite National Park in California. Both of those trips, both of those experiences I just loved so much. There is something so calming about nature; something so humbling that you can't get in a human environment. Granted, in human environments you get to see the culture, how different people have created these enormous, immense cities and how different people can live and yet how similar they are. But I think you can get lost in a city, but in nature you can find yourself. I'm a big fan of John Muir, he's kind of my idol. I've always been attracted to the natural aspects of different areas.

Extrinsic Factors. The first time I went abroad was in Costa Rica. It was only a one week trip and technically it wasn't really a study abroad but it was with a professor that

teaches at Penn State who taught one of my intro-level geography classes. I loved him and saw him a year and a half later at a presentation and he said he was taking some people to Costa Rica. I was like, “that sounds awesome!” And it was. Costa Rica was the first time I had been out of the country, well, I guess out of North America, so it was really cool. It was on a whim, I wanted to start traveling and I knew that I would be going abroad for my landscape architecture major because it’s required. Usually that’s in Rome but they changed up the curriculum about two years ago to Bonn, Germany and we were the second class that went. Then the Tanzania trip came out of interest because I knew that I was going to Costa Rica so I might as well continue my study abroad experiences. It was in the summer. It seemed really interesting and although I had not thought about going to Africa, it seemed like a great opportunity. Six weeks, 9 credits, and you get to work in a rural area at the base of this incredible national park- which is now ranked one of the most diverse national parks in the world I think. Then, the landscape architecture study abroad trip to Germany was required. But I was not going to complain.

In Costa Rica, we spent a week on a sustainable farm. We spent 4 days and 4 nights on the farm helping the farmer work and we got to experience a completely sustainable area. It was almost a part of a geography sustainability course, but not quite. Every day was so completely cool, we had breakfast then work all day but it was really, really fun. Then the Tanzania trip was with the landscape architecture program. It was more focused on immersing yourself completely into a different culture and trying to see what areas need the most in terms of landscape design and cartography, to help the local people manage their resources. Then the last one, the Germany study abroad, was mostly focused on urban design. We were meant to immerse ourselves in the city, and I think Europe is one of the best places to do it because it has a ton of landscape architecture, a ton of parks, plazas and a lot of progressive designs. It was great to be able to see them first-hand and see how they differ from a lot of the designs in the US.

In one year I got to go to Costa Rica, Tanzania and Europe. I’ve been to 4 continents within a year and my new goal is to reach all seven, including Antarctica, by age 30. I have an uncle that lives in the Philippines and especially after the hurricane, I

want to visit and do an East Asia/Australia trip for about a month or so and see that. Technically, I haven't been to South America, even though Costa Rica is part of Central America, but I want to do all of that and each of these trips has inspired me. I don't know if inspired is the right word, but they definitely encouraged me to pursue these.

Stories

I guess one of the interesting stories that I like is, last semester while studying abroad in Germany I took a weekend trip on my own to Zurich Switzerland and it was after a week-long trip in Barcelona with everyone in our group. I needed some time alone, so I purchased a blind booking ticket on one of the airlines in Bonn, Germany and I got Zurich. I had signed up for couch-surfing in the beginning of the semester and found someone to stay with and then met up with him when I landed in Zurich. I had Friday morning to myself and I explored the city on my own. Then I met up with him later on in the evening and we made dinner, shared a bottle of wine and then went out with some of his friends to a bar that they really like. All three days that I was there with him, he showed me around. I got to see some stuff that I wouldn't have seen if I had gone by myself or just looked at a tourist map. One morning I went for a run and then came back and we decided to go on a 4 hour hike. He had never been on the trail that we went on but he knew it took you up to this really nice peak where you get to see all of the city and Lake Zurich. He knew the easy way to go up there but he saw this really tiny trail and he decided to take that and was like, "I don't know where this goes." So we were on that trail for about 3 hours and we weren't sure if we were going to make it to the top. We finally did and he bought me some Swiss hot chocolate at the café that is up there which was really nice, then we took the train down. It was a really, really cool experience, an experience that I couldn't get in the US. I think one of the other cool things was one of the nights we spent at his friend's apartment. We played UNO except all the colors were in high German or Swiss German and all the numbers were in Swiss German so I got to learn some language there too. It was really fun. That was one of my favorite experiences while abroad.

There's a really fun story from Costa Rica. We took one of the days and we were not very close to civilization, in terms of distance we were about 30 kilometers away from a paved road and probably about 70 kilometers from an actual city. We were at the base of an active volcano, but we were there at the end of the rainy season so there had been a lot of water. We took this day long hike across three different trails through the woods and we got to see immense pineapple fields. They razed the land and planted these pineapples on them. The person we stayed with, the farmer, jokes that Costa Rica's two largest exports are water and soil, because they export all fruit and all the soil goes to the Pacific or to the Caribbean. Anyways, the ultimate goal of our hike was to reach this waterfall. The waterfall dropped into this really deep, clear pool and we spent the entire day just hanging out, swimming, jumping into the water and doing small little hikes around the top. It was a really neat adventure. There was a little trickle of a waterfall next to the larger waterfall. It was about 80 feet and two-thirds of us climbed it. It was just straight up, we were all in our swimsuits and we didn't have a rope or anything. It was free-hand; you had to find the next nook and pull yourself up. That experience was something I never could have imagined. As a landscape architect, we learn about ecotourism and take field trips to see really cool green landscapes, but that trip, hiking to and climbing that waterfall was something I would have never experienced if I hadn't spent time with that farmer. It's an experience that I will never forget.

Similarly, in Tanzania we had a few days at the end of the trip in Zanzibar and I still joke about it with the other 3 guys that were with me. We took a cab to this beach resort and there was a guy in this boat, it was low tide and we asked where he was going. He said there was a sandbar out in the middle of the water that he could take us to for 40,000 schillings. We figured, why not. He took us out there and it was this very small sandbar that was only exposed during low tide. We spent 2 or 3 hours on it until the last wave rolled up over top. It was the type of experience that you're not sure if it happened once it was over. The 4 of us still doubt if it was real or not because we don't have any proof. I mean, we didn't take any pictures; it was one of those lasting memories that will be perfect in our minds because there were no pictures to remind us. It was an unreal, supernatural experience.

In Costa Rica, I learned that I could climb a waterfall; it gave me a lot of confidence and courage because I looked at it and thought there was no way, how could I ever do that! My heart was pounding before we even started. I'm like, "this is scary!" and the person that led the trip, he had never climbed it and it was his first time climbing it too. Since he saw all of us doing it, he was like, "I guess I got to do it." So he did it too and that was the first time I had a lot of confidence in myself in terms of physical capabilities. Then in Tanzania with the trip to the sandbar, and that isolation made me think of my girlfriend and realize how far away we actually were and how much I missed her. The six weeks were almost up and it was almost time to go home. Being there with the other guys was really fun but I just realized how much I really wanted to see her again. Then in Germany, I think that was the longest separation I ever had, the entire trip really made me think of, "absence makes the heart grow fonder." For all three trips this was definitely true. I loved all three study abroad experiences and it was nice sharing those experiences with friends. I made new friends on each trip but all the while I wished she was there.

Expectations and Outcomes

Because Costa Rica was my first trip to a different speaking country with a lot of different cultural ideals, my expectations were pretty high in terms of expecting to have culture shock and see all these things. I had some experience with Spanish back in high school, so I wondered if I would actually remember any of it, if I could still speak it. I had been to the Bahamas once and had haggled and I wanted to see if the markets in Costa Rica were similar. However, I'm not the type to go into a trip thinking too much about it. I go in knowing I'm going to be there for a certain amount of time and have a basic idea of the itinerary, but not really thinking too much about it. I let the day go and follow through with whatever happens and then reflect on it at the end of the day. I took that same mentality into all three trips. I knew it was going to be really fun, I just didn't know what kind of fun it was going to be. I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, I just knew I was going to do something cool. In Costa Rica I learned that I could actually

Speak Spanish. I had a conversation with our bus driver for about three hours. I would help him with his English and he helped me with my Spanish, it was very interesting. I felt really cool because I could speak with the local people and there were not a lot of people that knew English so I could practice Spanish a lot and was able to get by on my own with the locals, ordering food, getting directions. But, it was very different in Africa. A lot of people we worked with did speak English but whenever we went to the markets, the merchants would only know a few English words, especially when they saw white people, they would try to get us to come over. My Swahili was very, very minimal. I knew the word, "maji," meant water and thanks to some big trucks that drove by we picked up a few words off their signs, but I don't even remember all the words now.

In Germany, we were required to take a German language course and I remember one instance in Ireland actually, my girlfriend and I were there for spring break and after 7 weeks of learning the language, I heard some people speaking German and I was able to have a very elementary conversation with them. My girlfriend was really impressed and was like, "How did you do that?!" I said, "Well, I have been taking German for 7 weeks!" and I was immersed in the language that whole time. If you try practicing it, when you order food, get a coffee, go to a train station, it becomes easier to pick up. If I ever want to fully learn German, I think it would be much easier after having lived there because I was able to hear the language spoken by true Germans and was constantly surrounded by it.

I would say my expectations were met, because in terms of how high or low they were, they were very low. Not as in I didn't think I was going to have fun...I guess I should say my expectations were minimal. I didn't have a lot, so all of them were met and exceeded. I loved the outcome of every one. I learned so much. I really think that studying abroad, even if it's for a month or 2 months, should be mandatory across the board. You can't get some of these experiences in the US and people need to be put in an uncomfortable environment and learn to adapt. Especially here in the US, we are confined to a very, very small ideological way, like the American dream. A lot of people still have that and we need to get over it. We need to see what other countries are doing. We are still using our US system of measurement while the entire rest of the world,

literally the entire rest of the world is using metric while we are still in the ounces and feet. We're a young country and I think it's important for our citizens and especially students, to see more mature cultures.

Costa Rica didn't involve any schoolwork. In Tanzania, we had a lot of work and very high expectations from the professors for our projects. We had a lot of work in Germany too; it was actually a perfect workload because we had 4 days of class per week from 9 to 5 so it felt like a job. Then we got the weekends to travel as part of an independent study as well. I think that the learning outcomes of all three were incredibly beneficial. I didn't know what to expect of what we would learn, but coming away from them, I was very happy with each. Each one was definitely worth it.

Meaning and Significance

Short-Term Impacts. I didn't experience culture shock too much while I was in Tanzania but when I came back I did. Tanzania was a very different experience from what I'm used to. There was almost no power, no cell phone use, no internet...so I had no connection to the outside world. I didn't really know what was going on in the news and coming back, I just felt flooded. I was overwhelmed with all these things because the six weeks I spent in Tanzania were so simple. All I had to do was focus on what I was doing each day. I didn't have to worry about anything else going on. It was just breakfast, then work for a little bit, maybe go on a research trip to some of the villages, then lunch and in the afternoon we would work on our projects or read, and then have dinner. After dinner we would hang out, talk or have a fire or something. Then coming back and having a smart phone, I felt like I didn't even want to check my emails. It was a reality check on how much and what I need in life. It directly affected me; I threw out almost half of my stuff, not right away, but after the trip I realized how much I didn't need and how much easier it is to live a simple life.

After Germany, whenever I would see a movie or something in the news with my friends, and I would recognize somewhere I've been I would say, "I was there." After probably only three days they got annoyed with it, which was really funny. Another small

thing that changed while I was in Germany that I still do now is, I guess it is common etiquette in German households, that if you eat right-handed you are supposed to cut with your right hand too. You're not supposed to switch utensils, so I learned to eat with my left hand. I still do that every time I eat.

I feel a strong connection to people who have had similar abroad experiences to me. It was a little tougher to talk to my girlfriend when I got back because she had not had any of the experiences at all. She was slightly jealous of the fact that I was able to study abroad so much and have those opportunities. It was just difficult because I wanted to talk to someone that had been to Africa or a third world country or who had similar experiences, so it was very frustrating when I got back. It was especially hard to return from Tanzania because I had the entire summer which was spent with no one from Tanzania. Sometimes I would just want to hang out and have a conversation. Now whenever I see someone who was in Tanzania with me, we are all really close and we always share those stories from our time there. I feel the same about Costa Rica; I made some of my best friends there. I want to be able to talk to someone that has those same experiences as me, on a more personal level.

I'm not sure if it was a direct result, it probably was, but one of my beliefs that led me to study abroad in these places was my belief in sustainability. This is one of the reasons that I took that trip to Costa Rica. Then I went to Africa to expand on that, to look at how people can live on local, natural resources; that was part of my project focus. As a major in geography and in the landscape architecture department, we always look at how we can make things more sustainable, make things last. I, more than ever, am focused on conserving water and electricity because I know how few resources people have elsewhere. When I eat and clean in my apartment, I have the mentality of conserving, recycling and reusing. So, those practices were there before but they were definitely enforced after my times abroad and made the necessity of these practices even clearer.

This semester has been really stressful, so sometimes I think back to last semester and how wonderful it was. I was able to put any stress away when I was in Germany and having the ability to travel so freely. Here, I feel like I don't have much freedom. I feel

too focused on work and I want to be able to travel again. I just have to remind myself this semester isn't everything. I don't have to have the perfect project, I don't have to get a 100% on every test or assignment. I want to focus on living, not necessarily working. If I would just leave State College and go somewhere for a day, I would feel so much better. It's just the mentality of being here; I have to remember sometimes that this isn't the only place on earth right now. There is a lot of stuff around here that we could go to that's not necessarily cheap but like New York City- it's only a 4 hour drive and then you have Pittsburgh, Philly, they're nice cities and I haven't explored all of them, I just don't know why I don't.

Long-Term Impacts. I definitely want to have a job that allows me to travel. There are a few careers that I am looking at right now. A lot of them are urban planning based but there are a few, such as National Geographic jobs that would be really interesting, like the Olympic design committee. You go to all these places and check out how it's done. I still want the freedom to travel and I think I will have to make the time to do it myself. So it's something that is just going to happen. Setting goals will help me achieve this, for example, I really want to go to Antarctica and I already spent time researching how to get there because there are some off-season cruises but they're expensive. One of the other things that is slightly inhibiting my desire to travel is purely the sustainability factor. Jet fuel is not very clean and it takes a lot of fuel to make one plane go.

One of the things that I learned while studying abroad in all of those places, is that I am very comfortable traveling. Now, I'm fine getting on a plane by myself and going somewhere and finally using the metro. DC would've frightened me. Also besides cities like New York and DC, many US cities don't have great public transportation. Especially in Europe that's all there is and it was so nice. Now, I don't want to drive anywhere here. At all! It's such a pain, I just want to get on a train and have it take me to work or bike somewhere.

Now, I do want to live in the city. I thought I wanted to have my own house outside of a city, but after living in a city for 4 months and having the flexibility of getting on a train and going to a larger train station that takes me to a completely different

city, I realized how nice that is. I didn't have to worry about a car or carrying my groceries as I walk or bike. I could have access to all those things in such a short distance as well as personable interactions with so many people. In the suburbs you can't do that. Some people have the mentality that a good fence makes a good neighbor, and I think that is kind of disturbing. Studying abroad has made me want to live in a city, either that or the extreme opposite and live off the land, somewhere out in the boondocks, completely off the grid.

I had thought about living abroad before because of a movie. It was called "Sicko," back in 2006 and it talked about how the French are very socialized with free healthcare, free tuition for college and all these great things. I thought it would be really cool to live in France. Now, after seeing it, it's true how awesome it is. I would absolutely consider living abroad and I have actually brought that up with my now fiancé. I think it would be really cool to live in Germany just because it's very progressive in terms of sustainability and clean energy and they have a lot of new designs going in. They are redesigning the old cities to have more efficient infrastructure. There is a lot of opportunity there. I think the only thing we would stay here for is family because we are both really close with our families. These are some things I had not thought or desired before I went abroad but there probably other things as well; it's hard to see the change when you are the one changing.

My mentality helped me have a lot of experiences. But the program in Germany did push me and gave me opportunities to travel because we had every Friday off and the whole weekend was meant as independent study for travel. We had a lot of those experiences. I wanted to be able to have cultural experiences, so I definitely pursued them on my own as well because I think that the most entertaining and fun times are the ones where you share good food or a good bottle of wine or beer and are able to talk and do what the locals do. If I study abroad again on my own, I want to take advantage of couch-surfing because the first 8 weeks that I was in Germany, I spent a lot of time traveling with other people from the program since I wasn't quite comfortable going alone. Then eventually, I decided, "Alright I'm doing this. I don't care where I go, so I'm just going to by random ticket and go there." I really do think that was one of the best experiences I

ever had traveling. You can find really nice people anywhere in the world and I want to find those people.

It's probably a little bit about how I was brought up, how I was raised. Both in school and by my parents and then a few experiences probably changed some of my perceptions on how I should live my life and what my interests are. I don't really know exactly what those were, but I am glad I am where I am now. I'm glad I had these really interesting and fantastic opportunities to study abroad. It's one of those things that you can't really get anywhere else and I think Penn State is a great school to offer these. When I was in Tanzania, we saw a Penn State grad at a mall in Dar es Salaam who was working on an off-shore drill. He saw one of our guys wearing a Penn State hat and asked us if we were from Penn State. Also, I get excited when I see someone that is German or hear someone speaking it.

When I was in Cape May this past summer I saw a guy wearing a Tusker shirt, Tusker is a beer that is made in Kenya. I asked him where he got it and he said he did a mission in southern Kenya near Mount Kilimanjaro. I thought that was so cool because I was in Tanzania last summer. We sparked a conversation simply because we shared something, we were both in Africa. It's cool because you are in a finite group of people, especially in the US, of those who go abroad. I don't know if you gain that knack for going abroad after you do so or it is one's perceptions, views and beliefs that cause them to study abroad. Seems like it's one of those things, what came first, the chicken or the egg? I think it depends on the person and whether or not they have the opportunity to study abroad. In my major, it is required for everyone to go abroad, but not everyone had the same mentality as I did about it.

The more you experience, the more you learn.

My name is Taoran and I'm from China. I am a junior and a double major in psychology and human geography, and I'm 21. I'm an undergraduate, fulltime student at Penn State. Since I'm from China, my first study abroad experience was in America and then last semester I went to South Africa for my geography degree. I am originally from the Northeast of China but then I went to another place. My hometown is very small so my parents sent me to a larger city to get a better education. When I was in middle school my parents found an international high school in Beijing with foreign teachers and we learned English in school. I was there for three years then I came to the US.

Motivations

The education system in my country is totally different from the system in the United States. In China, our elementary schools are very strict and we study a lot from the book and whatever, recite things, but those are all for a big exam. Then we enter into university and there, everyone just plays around. I think that people had too much stress when they were young and then when they have control of their own free time, they abuse the time. So I wanted to continue studying and a degree from the US is more valuable compared to China. Also I wanted to study psychology and a developing country like China doesn't have much going on in psychology. Since people are getting rich and their economic status is improving, I suppose they will become more mentally disordered in the future when they get money. But in America I know that psychology has been happening for a long time and Americans do most of the psychological research studies. That's what made me come here. The semester in South Africa was by chance; it was an option from my faculty advisor. She sent the email to me and the South Africa program counted for five 400 level geography classes. It seemed like an intense, real field trip for a geography major, to go out and see things helps more than studying in the classroom. And also I'm a traveler so I want to experience every continent.

Intrinsic Factors. It was too simple to go to the big classroom, get the lecture and go back to my dorm; I couldn't get connected with Americans. Since I didn't meet a lot of Americans, when I was a freshmen and a sophomore I felt that if I could go to South Africa with a group of people and be together day and night, we could talk more and I can personally improve my English. South Africa, locationally...oh that's not a word, but South Africa was a very interesting and comprehensive environment for me especially because I speak English as my second language. Also, I am from a developing country so my thoughts in South Africa were very different from my classmates. We were studying a lot about development, so those complicated elements together made me actually learn more than Americans who were in that group.

Extrinsic Factors. My major is Human Geography and the South Africa program provides very broad information about geography. It's not only geology or hard, physical geography but we also learned about the biodiversity, conservation and how to communicate with local people and help them to protect the environment. We learned from the real experiences we saw. We saw real conversation happen there, from the managers to the citizens. It was more human than the physical geography and South Africa also has a unique history; they had apartheid and that was not long ago. There are still obvious conflicts between whites and blacks.

The program was through Penn State so we were not on exchange; we stayed together and drove around the coast. Basically, there were 16 people in the group. 11 students and 5 faculty members who were all from Penn State and it was a semester long thing. During the study, a lot of local instructors gave us lectures and presentations; sometimes just once or twice but then others stayed for a week or two. Compared to classes on campus, studying abroad was more flexible in regards to teaching. I talked to people who work in the real world, not only my professors. This helped to supplement my college experience. Also, the relationships between the instructors in South Africa and the students were more friendly. We talked not only about academic subjects, but also about careers, daily hassles, and so on. It helped me learn in many different aspects.

Stories

In South Africa we went to a township. This one was outside of the main city. A lot of poor people were living there. I feel like Americans don't understand why the government does that because in America that kind of poor group of people doesn't exist. But in my country, poverty is very obvious; it is very similar to South Africa. I can understand more of that because Lago, China, where my parents and grandparents are from, was like that. So when I was young, I actually experienced some of the same; I can stand on the local people's side to see what's happening.

So basically there were groups and we did two main projects. For the first one, we did research in one location and then moved to another place while we were still working on the project. We proposed some ideas for the place and did a lot of paper work. We also had a final project and each year the group has done different work. Our group interviewed different people and turned it into a video. We designed the assignment ourselves and put in all the information the professors wanted. Then we edited it and put it together, 11 students together doing group work. That was very impressive to both the students and professors. Through those days we were dying day and night, alternating hours to work on the video...it was like a war to finish the assignment. Finally we got a very good result and it was a great memory not only for us but also we could show it to our friends and family so they could have a better idea of what we did, not through paperwork or pictures but people talking and doing things in the video. We were very proud.

We caught frogs! We also got snakes and we got dragonflies, we set traps for those. Actually, I feel so bad. That was not my first time doing those things but we did it in the name of science, for others to benefit from the experience and education because we were trying to discover new species. Before that, when I touched a snake it was as a tourist thing; a new thing to stimulate you and tell your friends about. But this time, we were helping the local scientists do their job. From that, we also learned what their habitats are like and how to catch and preserve them. We learned about a lot of different kinds of frogs and what their names are. I don't if it was very useful for me, but it was

good to learn. These scientists didn't feel like this was a job, they wanted to do it and they were excited about catching them and finding new species in a new environment. This experience may not have told me what I want to do in the future, but it showed me how to plan and choose my career. My attitude is more important than what I do. Years ago, I always thought about what kind of major would give me a good job with a high salary. Now, I feel it is more valuable to choose something I am passionate about for my career. From the frog example, I wouldn't say that I really liked that experience and I don't want that for a job, but I would choose something just like the scientists chose that job for themselves, something that I will be passionate about. If I can feel excitement during my job, I think it's a big success. It doesn't matter what I get for a salary.

Expectations and Outcomes

Personally, I expected this trip to be challenging. I wanted to challenge myself to speak to other Americans and speak in front of people; give presentations and do group work with other people. I didn't have a very good experience working with people when I was a freshman, I was very hesitant and I would have an idea in my mind that I couldn't express or I would express them wrong. It's a totally different situation when a group of people all studies abroad. We could stick with each other. Now, after the study abroad, I really like to talk in front of people and make a lot of friends. It's very different from who I was before the trip. This experience was specific to me, it wasn't for other people who were on the trip but that was my original purpose of the trip. Besides that, I also liked the knowledge I gained about sustainability and soils and going to game reserves. I expected that we would have more time to spend with local South Africans than we actually did. We also learned about the animals and landscapes, but the human part was not enough for me, probably because of the language problem first and the cultural differences. The time we had wasn't a full semester and we changed locations often, so we couldn't really get along with the local people.

Goals. I kind of evolved. It was very hard at Penn State because you only go to class and after class everybody leaves and the seats change all the time. You don't have opportunity to deeply know other people, especially when I was a freshman and all my classes were lectures. The only Americans that I talked to were my advisor and professors. So they're not, they can't be your friends basically because of a lot of things. Also, if you can't understand what people say, you can't be friends with them. You just don't have common experiences. In China, we grew up in a totally different environment; what you like and what music you listen to and the movies, all different. We hardly find any common topics to talk about for a long time. Then maybe we just have shallow, you know, "How are you today?" talk and things like that. It's not what I thought but you can't judge because nobody is going to be very interested in you just because they see you there. I thought if I can only finish my degree and then go back home, directly after graduation since at that time, I felt, I can't belong here. It was very hard for me the first semester because I hardly paid attention in the lecture too and I couldn't fully understand what the professor was talking about. My grades were not that good and I only had 13 credits. Everything was just very hard at first. Studying abroad helped because it was a group of people that stuck together every day and there were chances to know more about each other. That was the greatest thing I felt from the trip.

The chance to study abroad just came to me and when I applied then it became my goal to go on the trip. Maybe I wouldn't study a lot because we didn't have textbooks or internet but I thought, at least I could improve my language and know more people and cultural things. So it benefited me for that time and the future. For my personal goals, I am very satisfied with how they have been met. Now I am taking 19 credits and then next semester I am taking 22.5, but I can handle that now. I am still a second language in English, but I feel, if I can make time, I can write, read and do anything like a student here. I don't feel I am different, well, I'm very different from other Americans here, but I feel more like I fit in the environment. I am very comfortable now to talk to people or even making fun of others. Yeah, that's an ability I actually like.

The program started in 2010, so it was not too long ago. The group did a lot of new things every time. We went to different places than the previous group. Most

experiences we had were new. There were some...not accidents but unexpected things happened. We talked a lot about assignments and the program's structure with the professors. On one side, we all understood a lot about how the program works, but on the other side we had less time to study the real knowledge. I think we gained more experiences than actual knowledge through the whole thing, but since it was all in English, I was learning every second. We also didn't have holidays or weekends so it was a little stressful. As a whole, I am very satisfied with the experience.

I think it was easier for me to understand South Africa but there were still difficulties because they have a different culture from us. We both have long histories. For example, in South Africa different people in the family have different names and we have that too. When we had a small, little discussion with some South Africans about names, I basically understood everything the local South Africans said. I didn't have questions about that but it is a very interesting topic to American students because they don't have that. I guess for a country with a long history, we have that in common but when we talk about specific things, they are all different. The rural areas are very similar in China and South Africa, they cut trees for fire for example. The difference is in South Africa they have a lot of languages and although we have a lot of languages too, we mainly speak Mandarin and Cantonese. In South Africa they have Afrikaans, English and other kinds of totally different languages. They are all official languages so it is very difficult for people to communicate with each other because there are too many in the country. The good thing is the universities are all teaching English. We teach in Chinese so Chinese college students may not have very good English because they only do one subject, not a whole system in English. There are a lot more, but those are the main differences that come to mind.

Meaning and Significance

Short-Term Impacts. I got a lot of tan. I tanned so much that when my mom was in the airport, she shut down. I told her I tanned a lot. So when she saw me, I asked her, "Ok, well what do you think?" She was like, "Well let's go home," and when this semester

started and she sent me to the airport, she said, “When you got back home I didn’t want to talk about your skin color.” In our country getting tan is not very popular. Without speaking to me, people could tell that I have been somewhere hot because of my tan. Most my friends just asked, “Oh, did you see the lions? Did you see animals?” I just kept talking about what we did there and they didn’t even know there were white people in South Africa. They would think like it’s the southern part of Africa but actually it’s a country. So I just talked about what we did there and they are like, “Oh, do they have food?” and I was like “Yeah! They are kind of rich in the city.” I think that my experience gives them a second hand experience of what the real South Africa is because I think most people in China have a lot of misunderstandings about South Africa. A lot of my friends they didn’t, they still don’t understand why I went or why I choose there. They thought, I already go to America, why would I go to South Africa for a semester? It’s very hard to explain to them, because they just don’t understand. They don’t understand me.

I met a lot of friends there and all of them are Penn State students. This semester I joined a service fraternity and that also changed me a lot. I think it is a benefit from my study abroad experience, an extra thing that has nothing to do with the program itself. I joined the frat this semester and I am running for a position for next semester. It’s a challenge because I will give presentations every week even though it’s a chill thing, I’m talking to friends, not like a formal exam but I believe I will gain some skills from that. And also I met a lot of people from knowing just those ten other people on the trip. From those ten people, now I know maybe more than 100 students at Penn State. So I experience more. I will go to a Penn State football game which I have never been to before and I did a camping trip with Americans. I have been like a stereotype to Americans before I had all these experiences, but now I feel like cultural differences and where you are from doesn’t actually determine who will be your friends. Because when you know someone you like personally, it is a universal thing. You only notice personality trait differences; there are no nationality differences between people. I think the study abroad experience has changed and enlarged my friends circle. Now I do not

only stay in a group of Chinese study abroad students, I check my Facebook because I have like 300 friends and I only got my Facebook when I was a freshman so that's a lot!

Long-Term Impacts. After South Africa, I started to look up the conservation program in China. I was very surprised by how people strive for their country and environment protection. During the trip I learned that China used to know a huge base of species but now, we're much more focused on the industrial urbanization thing. We kind of ignore the other part. But looking to South Africa, they are developing and they also pay a lot of attention to the environment. As for industrial development, I feel like if you make things it will happen, but for the environment, it's being reduced and it will keep decreasing if you ignore it. Even though South Africa is protecting the environment so hard, it is decreasing, so it's very sad when your citizens do know what happening around them. Most of China is now covered by a haze. We all have no idea when the haze will disappear. The pollution is so severe that many textbooks and published articles in ecology and geography have written about it. I believe this disaster will be in Chinese history and even years after, people should learn about the responsibility of protecting our environment. I think people just have to pay attention...it's not a choice now. I feel that if I can do something for that, if I can influence a small group of people, like maybe add this park into the application system or post or advertise those things on TV. I started to look up the organizations in China and see if I can do something like that because it interests me and I want to travel. It basically just gave me a new idea of what I can do in the future. So it's a big thing.

I realized American students are very good at critical thinking. When I was in China, my teacher taught me that I had to learn how to think critically because it's a very important thing in Western countries. You cannot always follow what the teacher says because they may be wrong and you have to critique them. Not only point out their faults, but also see the good things and compare and contrast them and then put them together to make your own thoughts. That's the most important thing I learned from Americans. Also they are very independent, not only in thoughts but also I feel like they can do anything. They felt like being somewhere without the internet is not a big deal. It is not

like in China when we are freaking out without internet, like what the heck. Parents will say, "I won't send you there." I didn't tell my parents stuff, but I was very different with my parents because I also am independent. But still, it was hard sometimes. In South Africa, there was a swimming hole and I didn't go in it, but all the Americans did. I was actually scared but they didn't know because I didn't tell them. They tend to experience new things to gain more. I mean, if you experience more, I'm sure that you will know more. But it's also good to listen to what they think. So critical thinking is very important. The whole adaptation experience was very new for me, so every day I learned from the Americans.

I may not go back home after graduation. I may stay here for graduate studies and maybe for PhD very possibly. I also have close friends here so I may also keep in touch with them. I also want my kids to experience study abroad, maybe not in America, but in the same way. I also want to bring what I learned in America back to my home so eventually I will go back because my family is there and I think my country needs my efforts.

Realizing What's Important, What's Not and When to Jump In Head First.

My name is Ericka Roberts, I'm a senior at Penn State University studying Community, Environment and Development and my option is International Development. I have a minor in Sociology. I grew up pretty much all over the world because my parents are military. My mom's retired and my dad is still in but retiring relatively soon. I've lived all over the US and several countries in Europe as well. That is what prompted me to enter my major and continue traveling by studying abroad. I studied abroad in New Zealand at Lincoln University which is in the Canterbury region, on the southern island.

Motivations

Intrinsic Factors. Being a military child really motivated me to study abroad. I'm used to moving every two years, and being at Penn State, I studied abroad the spring of my sophomore year because by then I was getting really antsy and wanted a change of scenery I suppose. Most people go abroad as a junior, but I really didn't want to wait. I hunted for a study abroad option that would allow me to leave as a sophomore. Originally, I wanted to go to Australia but they didn't have any programs for sophomores, but New Zealand did. I didn't have much knowledge of New Zealand but I thought "Aw, what's the difference," and I ended up learning a lot. There is a huge difference between the two countries obviously but I figured that I might as well go ahead and try it, because how often does a person get the chance to travel to that other side of the world? So that's why I went ahead and took that opportunity.

In terms of my attitudes and values, when I was younger I didn't really enjoy moving around a lot and I sort of wanted to have that hometown experience that other people have when they grew up in one place their whole lives and they know a lot of people there. As I got older, especially since college, I realized all the traveling shaped me into who I am today and I really like who I am. I think that the experience of moving around so often has played a really big role in my development and I want to continue

that and broaden my knowledge of the world through travel. I think that you can learn a lot about a country through the internet or reading a book but it's totally different when you actually set foot on the ground and are able to interact with people from all over the world. With this particular program, there were people there from France, Ireland, Scandinavian countries and all over. It was awesome to get to do that and I think that is something you can only experience through living abroad. The realization that you can have so many unique experiences abroad made me desire to shape myself and my personality through traveling. That is what motivated me to study abroad.

Extrinsic Factors. Since I studied abroad earlier than most people, I missed the boat on getting anything out of it in terms of credits or fulfilling a minor. I did get some general education credits and those classes factored into my specialization. In Community, Environment and Development (CED) we need to have a specialization and I ended up with something really unique, landscape architecture and recreation, which is not something I would have gotten at Penn State. In terms of getting a specific class, I don't think that I took enough time to really look into what was offered at Lincoln and make sure that it would transfer back to fulfill major requirements.

The trip was a direct enrollment to Lincoln University, so I had to apply and get accepted to the school first before I applied through Penn State. It actually happens at the same time, you apply to study abroad and through that there are all kind of links to apply to the school. Most of Lincoln's students are international students. They have a really small school, with only about 3,000 students. I still have some really good friends I met from France, South Africa and all over the continent of North America. Also a lot of Europeans and of course, Kiwis as well. Kiwis are what native European New Zealanders are called. I got really close to one American student from Colorado, my friend Maggie who I still love to death and I also made friends with a New Zealand native named Claire, our residence assistant. She has come to the US a few times and I have been able to hang out with her. I met a lot of people, and I try to keep in contact with them through Facebook and that kind of thing. My friend Thibault from France is actually coming to Boston University for a semester and he's like, "Ok I definitely need to meet up with you

because you are from the DC area and I definitely want to see DC.” So, I feel like those relationships that I have formed there have continued to sustain themselves.

I made the decision to live on campus. The way they do it is in terms of the meal plan. There is only one cafeteria on the whole campus, but you have to consider that from my dorm to the farthest class building was a 5 minute walk. So, it’s a really small campus which was definitely a change of pace. In the cafeteria, there were specific meal times compared to Americans who just graze all day. The meal plans are full, half or nothing. I had a full meal plan, so the university supplied me with breakfast, lunch and dinner. I lived in a specific area that was closest to the cafeteria. The half plan only got dinner so they would have to go grocery shopping and cook their own breakfast and lunch. Our area didn’t have a kitchen but theirs did. Then for the third plan, you didn’t get any meals on campus and their houses were out near the cricket pitch; they had a real living room, kitchen, four bedrooms and a bathroom. I decided I didn’t want to deal with going to the grocery store and cooking so I chose the full meal plan and dorm. You could also live off campus, but I didn’t want to deal with that either.

Stories

I feel like the biggest thing that comes to mind is something that gave me that “A-ha” moment. It really messed me up for a while and I think it was two specific occasions and then an overall sort of theme. Ok, I’m setting up the theme here. Before I left, all of my traveling was with my parents and this was the first time I would be going somewhere by myself. My mom was asking me what the demographic composition of New Zealand was and because I’m African American, she wanted to know if there would be other minorities there. She was wondering if it would be an issue. I looked and saw that they have a native population called the Maori. They were there before the Europeans which happens in most cases, but I didn’t really think about it too much in terms of minorities like me I guess. To me, I guess it was no big deal and I was like, “Mom, you’re being too picky about these kinds of things. I’ll be fine.” I didn’t think about how much of a big of a deal it was in New Zealand compared to the US because in the United States, our

demographic composition is more mixed, we're a melting pot as people say, and also, people are politically correct in the US. They will say, "Oh she's African American," or, "She's Asian American." People are very politically correct and I had one instance where I realized that does not exist in New Zealand to an extent. It was in a landscape architecture class I took. It was the first day and because this school has so many international students, the professor was asking people where we were from. He brought up a map and was scrolling around the globe and asking people where they were from. I was sitting there minding my own business, not really paying attention and he asked, "So where are you from?" and I said, "I'm from Virginia, in the US, on the east coast." Then he said, "Oh, so you're not African?" I said, "No, I'm an American. I'm from Virginia, near the capital." He was like, "Oh ok," and then scrolled over to America. That was an interesting thing to me, to realize people immediately view me as an African.

I feel like in the US, people are real specific about whether or not you are Asian American or African American but when you get out of the US, people think that it's like, "Oh you're just an American." I guess the view of yourself changes. On my passport, it doesn't say African American, it says American and then it says that I'm black. So, I thought that was very interesting and it sort of stuck with me for a bit. Then there was another occasion where I was in a card game with people in my dorm. There were a couple Americans, a couple kiwis...so they're all white and I was the only dark skinned person. I think the game was called mafia. There is one person who is secretly the mafia and they have to "kill" people. Then there are cops and they figure out who was killed and it's all a mystery what role everyone has. During one round, I was killed and someone asked how I had died. This New Zealander said, "Oh you were lynched." I was so done. I felt like in that moment I could see my American friend's face go completely pale. She was like, "That's not okay." I couldn't believe he said that to me. But to them, to the New Zealanders, it just wasn't that big of a deal. To us Americans, it was not okay and after that I stopped playing. I needed to go process what just happened. I was really upset about it and I remember my friend Maggie from Colorado State came to me and couldn't believe they said that either. We didn't understand how they could think that was okay. They didn't even realize how offensive that way to me. Another guy who was

from Colorado said, “Their perception is like slightly different because they don’t have the experience of being around African Americans and they may have learned about it in school, but it’s not something they are taught to be socially aware of. I tried to brush it off, but I never made friends with those people.

I feel like there was another time something like that happened with an American saying something to me and I’m not quite sure if he was just racist or if he thought it was ok because he was hearing it around him at the time. I thought that was really strange because he went to Michigan State and Detroit, Michigan is predominately black. Anyways, he went to go find me on Facebook and he was like, “Oh Ericka, what sort of ghetto spelling does that have?” and I’m like, “Are you serious right now?” I wanted to take his iPad and break it over my knee, I was so upset about it and I didn’t make friends with him either.

Another less offensive but slightly interesting moment was when I realized I was the only African American on the entire campus of like 2,000 people. I don’t remember where he was from, but a dark skinned African came up to me at a party and said, “Are you Ericka?” I had never met him or seen him in my life. And I’m like, “Yea, do I know you?” He said, “No, but we’ve heard about you and we’ve never met an African American before. We have so many questions.” I thought it was so strange, something like this had never happened to me in my life! He said, “You know, people know who you are.” There was another occasion where my friend Maggie said that people were asking her about me. Everyone knew my name and I did not know them! It was like being a celebrity but not necessarily in a positive way, 100% of the time. It was really strange.

I think that on some of those occasions, I remember being really upset and it sort of broke me down a little bit. Broke me down but then built me back up. The way the dorms were set up, it was like pods. Each one had their own room but we shared a bathroom and each room had a door so you had your own little space with a desk and everything. I remember one night thinking about some of the things people had said to me and I got really upset about it and started crying. I am not big on that, I was raised by military parents and my mom says you can’t ever cry in public; if you had to cry, do it at

home, do it around your family. I knew that race was always around and it's something that's always there but it's not necessarily focused on in the US because people try to down play it. In the US, there's more social consciousness and awareness where people know they have to be politically correct. I think that degree of political correctness is uniquely American and it does not exist in New Zealand. I realized when you're outside the US or in some parts of the US, people see you as the color of your skin and that is always how it's going to be. I don't want to say I was blissfully unaware of this beforehand, but I think it just really hit me that most of the time it is about race. When I talk about race with friends from my major, they will make a comment, "Oh but it's not always about race, Ericka," but I'm like, "It is!" I feel like people who aren't of a minority don't realize it's always about race and I think that really hit me when I was in New Zealand. That would probably be my one take away moment and it sort of negatively impacted my experience there.

I have to think of my trip and those experiences as separate entities because I really did have a good time in New Zealand, and I'm so glad I got to study abroad. At the same time, I did learn from those experiences in terms of how other people view me, how I need to be aware of it and how I can't let it break me down. In order to change my view on my study abroad experience, I have to think of them as separate occasions because if I think of all the racial things I dealt with, I immediately hated studying abroad, I hated it. But if I think about being around those people that didn't treat me that way, traveling around the country for two weeks, and the friends that I made, then I loved studying abroad. I feel like a double-sided coin on my study abroad experience, because I'm not sure exactly how I should feel overall.

It's an experience that everyone, especially any minority has to have because we have to be aware of what's taking place behind the scenes, like maybe why you didn't get that job, even if you are qualified; or maybe why a store owner followed you while you were in a store. It's an experience that everyone needs to have. I was about 18 or 19 at the time and I think that at that age, it was time for me to have that experience, that epiphany. I was not expecting that to happen on my trip. I was prepared for, "Oh study abroad is so much fun!" and I definitely did get that typical experience and had such a good time. But

I didn't think that racial issues would be something I was going to learn. Maybe if I had gone somewhere else I would not have had that experience. I was definitely not something I was expecting. Even after my mom asked me about the demographics of the country, it just went over my head like no big deal.

Expectations and Outcomes

I think that everyone always comes back from studying abroad and is like, "I had such a great time and it really changed me as a person," and I think in the back of my mind, I really wanted one of those moments where I felt like it totally rocked my world and changed me as a person, with an overall new look on life- that kind of thing. I guess that sort of happened. In retrospect, in a minor way, not a really big epiphany, but I feel that it sort of changed me in some small ways.

In terms of experiences, New Zealand's really well known for its adventure tourism, so I was definitely expecting to do some like crazy stuff and I did. They have a two week break in the middle of the semester which is like their spring break even though their seasons are opposite. It was a little bit cold but for the first part of the break a group of friends and I drove all around the southern island and did all sorts of stuff. We practically went on a cruise of the country and then the second week we flew up to the top of the northern island, booked buses and traveled all the way down to the capital and then flew back. So I was definitely expecting lots of travel.

I was hoping to make a lot of friends that I would still be able to keep in contact with when I came back and that definitely happened. In terms of classes and stuff, I took a lot of classes that you would not be able to at Penn State. I took cultural heritage interpretation, tourism, farm systems sustainability and landscape architecture. Those were all really interesting because I hadn't learned anything about sheep and deer farming before. In terms of cultural heritage interpretation, it is really linked to tourism because they want to do eco-tourism or adventure tourism and have less impact on the environment as well as interpret the local culture. I was expecting to learn some

interesting things and I definitely did. So I think those were probably my expectations that were met.

One thing I expected that didn't happen was making more New Zealand friends. I don't know if that was partially because of the composition of the school because I was told by a few Kiwis that since the school has so many international students, people leave every semester or two so maybe the local students subconsciously try not to get too close to people they know will leave soon. I did make some kiwi friends but I think I've only kept in good contact with one and that was my RA. I wasn't expecting to make as many American and European friends as I did. I also was not expecting this, but I became a lot more environmentally conscious. New Zealand's all about keeping the tourism industry large and decreasing their carbon foot print, partially because the hole in the ozone layer is basically right over New Zealand, so they care a lot about the environment. I used to hear things from Claire, like "I can't believe you Americans take the elevator" or you know, "Why are you guys drying your clothes in the dryer, why don't you just hang them on the line outside?" My friend Maggie and I have pictures of ourselves using a clothesline because especially if you grew up in the city or something, we don't do that. I use the dryer here now but I think that is because our environment doesn't really support the alternatives. At Lincoln, outside of the dorms, there was a specific area with clotheslines to hang their clothes. So when I was there I washed my clothes and didn't use a dryer.

Now, I basically never take the elevator unless I'm carrying something. Even in my building here, I live on the fifth floor and unless I just went grocery shopping or whatever, I don't take the elevator, I always take the stairs. It irritates me now when I see people take the elevator to the second or third floor. I'm like, "What are you doing?" In New Zealand I think one of the reasons they do it is because they don't want to use the electricity. But also, last year Christchurch, which is right outside of Lincoln, was hit by that huge, huge earthquake. People, especially in that area are afraid of getting trapped in elevators if there is an earthquake. That is another reason that they don't take elevators. I think it's sort of like rubbed off on me. I would rather take the stairs than anything else. People take the elevator down, but it's not hard to go down three flights of stairs. So I

became more aware in that retrospect. I am more interested in ecotourism and the idea of studying tourism, since it is such a major factor of the economy. Also, taking the bus everywhere definitely rubbed off on me. We would use the buses for going to the mall and back to campus.

I think my housing choice had a huge impact on my overall experience. Our building was definitely purposefully chosen, because there were six rooms in each pod and they put all five of us Americans in the same pod. The sixth person was a guy from China. I feel like that was a bad idea because by doing that you discourage cross-cultural interactions. When you live with people, you spend most of your time with them. Also, when you are in a foreign country, you naturally want to find people who are similar to you. That is probably why my best friend from studying abroad is from Colorado. I spent so much time with her because we ate all our meals together, we had two classes together and we lived with each other. The two week trip I did was with all Americans. The living situation definitely impacted my experience.

I think it was a good choice because when friendships started to form, everyone would have dinner together. It was like a family which was weird because it is not like that at Penn State. Here, you have to plan to meet with someone because you won't likely bump into them on campus. But at Lincoln, there were only 3 hours for dinner and at some point you knew everyone would be there. All the people would come together and we would spend the whole time talking and planning trips and that kind of stuff. It definitely had an impact because the people who only had dinner with us didn't have as much opportunity to get to know people. I definitely think that had an impact because we formed this sort of weird family, especially with the international students and any New Zealanders that wanted to be friends with us.

Goals. I remember looking at the Lincoln University website and seeing the classes they had to offer and thinking I'm definitely going to take some pretty interesting classes while I'm here, because why not? That was definitely a conscious effort to pursue interesting classes. With making friends, I think I had to push myself to do that because I remember after the first day of being there or after sleeping for 24 hours, because it took

24 hours to get there, I wasn't feeling like interacting with people but I knew I needed to. At that time, I was a sophomore in college and a lot shyer than I am now. I had to say, "I can't come to another country and spend the whole time by myself. I need to make friends with people." I remember meeting Maggie and she was crazy and I loved her and I think her personality sort of pulled my personality into being more extroverted and we would just go talk to people we thought were interesting or if they spoke French for example. We would just come up with excuses to meet new people. So, it partially just happened but was also an effort. Maggie and I were both sort of weird and lived like two feet from each other, so we just became a pair. When people would see one of us, the other one was not far behind. I think when that happened everything was so purposeful because we were like, "Alright we spend too much time together, we need to go find some people to hang out with." Or, "I heard this person does this because of where they are from so we would try to go learn about them!"

Then people also wanted to know about us. We loved having conversations about America, especially with Thibault, who is from Paris and wanted to know so much about America and practice his English. He had to take an exam to meet a language requirement and he barely passed so he said, "Everyday, everyday I want to sit down with my Americans and I want to speak English and I want to learn things about you guys and if I make a mistake you have to correct me." I remember editing his papers and spending time talking with him. A few New Zealanders asked me about using red solo cups in the US and I remember having a whole conversation about how the media really misrepresents college students in America; it was all based off of movies that they have seen. Also, I think because of the composition of this school, it was like the United Nations; a great opportunity to exchange and learn different things. Now, I'm taking French and I still contact Thibault to help me with my French homework. The way the school was set up allowed me to learn about other countries.

Challenges. There were a few reasons I feel like I didn't make as many Kiwi friends as I expected. Legal drinking age in New Zealand is 18 and there were so many parties all of the time. I talked with Claire, the RA and she told me that she wished the drinking age

was 21 because she felt that 18 year olds were too immature to deal with alcohol. There were campus rules about who could have alcohol and in what forms. But I think the drinking culture deterred me from making New Zealand friends. The boys especially were very big on drinking because a lot of them just turned 18 and they could not handle themselves. I remember them being in common rooms, drunk and wrestling and I was just not interested in doing that. I think there was a big difference between the Americans and Europeans versus the New Zealanders who were of drinking age. I'm not really sure why. It may have just been the particular group. Also, I think that people who study abroad are a little more mature and different than the average college student. I think those who study abroad are the best people. Whenever we talk about students from China or Korea who come to the US, they are always the best students. I think that many Americans who go abroad are also the best students.

I'm not really sure if anything else kept me from making New Zealand friends but I actually think there was sort of a standoffish nature with the boys especially. I think I saw more male Kiwis than female which was kind of weird. I thought I needed to get out more so I remember going to learn to play rugby because it's a huge sport over there and they were doing a touch rugby lesson. I was sitting out for one of the games because I was tired and there were three boys who were sitting out too and they would not engage me in conversation. It was really strange and I kept trying to talk to them but they would only talk amongst themselves or talk about classes or what was going on with their lives, things I couldn't make myself a part of and they didn't try to interact with me. I think that happened early on, like the first week, and that sort of made me think, "You don't want to be friends with me, so never mind."

I remember for break, I thought I would definitely have made a New Zealand friend by then and I would go to their house for break. I could have stayed with Claire but her house was destroyed from the earthquake so her family was living elsewhere. She did take us to her house that was under construction.

Meaning and Significance

Short Term Impacts. I don't take elevators. One thing that I did when I came back but I stopped doing very quickly because it's not something that people do here, is going around without shoes. It's something that is completely accepted in New Zealand; you can even go to a store without shoes on. "No shirt, no shoes, no service," doesn't exist. People take public transportation without shoes on, people walk without shoes on and I love that, especially when it's warm. I love it, and so I rarely wore shoes when I was there until it started to get cold. I think it happened once or twice when I came back where people would stare at me and in class I had a professor ask me where my shoes were. So I stopped doing that all together and I still do it around the house obviously and I would go get the mail without shoes or something, but obviously it's something you can't do on a daily basis in the US because of the, "No shirt, no shoes, no service," rule.

Although I was already conscious of my water usage and recycling, I think these practices got stronger after I studied abroad. I even wrote a paper on it because in Canterbury they have a water problem, even though it is a developed country. The problem is even though they don't have to pay for water, they have to pay for the infrastructure. Once the infrastructure was in place, they don't have to pay for the water and the farms don't have many restrictions on keeping their animals away from the water sources. By law, they don't have to put up a fence to keep animals from going into the water or going to the bathroom in the water. So it gets ruined and they have terrible water quality in some places. Part of it is that farmers don't want to have to pay to fix those kinds of things and the government doesn't have enough power to make them because farming is such a large industry that farmers have a lot of power, especially in the Canterbury region. I definitely started watching my energy use and water consumption. Also, I don't really eat beef anymore because they are really big on free range and according to Claire, there is a huge taste difference, which I think there is too. That sort of had an impact on my consumption because I thought a lot about how animals are treated and I loved to drive around the country and see all the sheep in the fields and the dairy cows get to roam and do whatever they want. It's very picturesque and nice. That

impacted how I thought about their farming system there and the way I look at things as a consumer.

I think another thing that impacted me was in terms of energy, the heat in my apartment is never on; I never turn it on. I started leaning more towards if it's cold, go put on a sweater. I would rather bundle myself up than use all that energy unless it's really freezing. When I was there, I always kept my window open, which was something they were into, fresh air and being one with nature. I love having my window open. I lived on the ground floor so everyone would leave their windows open and we would go in each other's room through the window. I don't know why we did that but even when I'm here I like to have my window open.

I still like rugby! At home, I watched the rugby world cup and France was playing and so I had to jump on Facebook and talk to Thibault about it. He was like, "You guys get rugby there?" And I was like, "Yeah! I found it on BBC or something." Rugby is way better than football. Cricket makes no sense but that's another thing. They are also really into being in shape. People were really big on working out and I had a gym membership when I was there. I would run a 5k at least three times a week. In general, people there are shorter and stockier but they are very in shape. I don't think I ever saw someone who was tall and lanky. I don't know if it's the sports they play or what they are eating, I don't know. Pretty much everyone I knew played a sport or went to the gym.

I already upheld many of these traits or values, I just didn't really realize what I was doing. At home, I have always promoted recycling so I think that was already there and turning off the lights, that sort of thing. These things were so much more consciously part of their society, that it really sparked the desire in me to do these things too. For example, I have always loved animals but never thought about how institutionalized the treatment of animals is and the farm sustainability class I took compared a lot of things to the US which was really interesting. The US is often a big example for everyone because we are a "superpower." I also remember a professor trying to quiz me on what my beliefs were and he thought, "You should know this, you're an American." I remember him comparing the way the U.S. farming system runs, with the Farm Bill, and comparing it to how the New Zealand farming system runs and any bills that they may have. I never

thought about how people view the US around the entire world and one thing I did learn, is that when you are abroad you are always an ambassador for the U.S. I put that in my application for the Peace Corps; study abroad taught me that you are always representing the U.S. and you should always be in good form.

People over there are always talking about the newest PETA video while these farming issues were not things I really thought about before. We did a lot of field trips to different farms; I went to a deer farm, a dairy farm and all that kind of stuff. I think that seeing the way they run, I was really curious about comparing it to those secret videos that people take to expose things in US farming. Comparing these two things and the serious discrepancy in life for the animals, really encouraged me to stop eating beef and pork. I'm slowly cutting back on those kinds of things.

Also, I learned a bit about Maori culture and it was very similar to the Native Americans in the US. You can compare them because they are very isolated in terms of politics, their representation and how they were on the land first. The history is very scripted, similar to in the US with Native Americans. Tourism has played a huge role in differentiating between their actual culture and their marketable culture in order to bring in money for their tribes. I did not know that about the Maori people before I went to study there, but I think learning about them made me think more about American Indians and brought those discussions and thoughts to the surface. That is the common thing with all these new things I learned and new things I do, they were already sort of there in my mind, but studying abroad sparked them and brought them to the surface.

Long-Term Impacts. Every time I tell someone I studied abroad and that I'm interested in working in underdeveloped countries, they assume I must have studied in an underdeveloped country. When I tell them I was in New Zealand, I think people undervalue my experience or think I didn't gain any experience in international development. However, I think that in terms of how it will impact my future, I think that has helped me develop a lot of soft skills.

Some of the things that I experienced really forced me to step up to the plate. It was good to learn that I can do things by myself without my parents and I am smart

enough to figure out what to do. One of the soft skills I gained is the ability to improvise. Also, in terms of dealing with the racial issues, I had to learn how to handle someone even if they are not being politically correct and how to teach people when they are offending you. I think that you really have to put on a mask to do that in order to communicate without people being distracted by your emotions. It's definitely made me a harder person and I can take anything anyone says to me and then decide what to do about it. Also, it's made me a little bit more of a friendlier person, and more outgoing. I think that now, I am more capable of interacting with people after being an international student.

My experience abroad taught me to know how to act with people who are not Americans. There will be cultural barriers, language barriers, and all that kind of stuff. I think through studying abroad I learned how to find common ground between two people and be able to make them your friend, even though you might not speak the same language or their English is choppy. It has definitely impacted my future, because everything I learned and experienced, I know I can deal with that again, like the race thing, or making quick decisions or interacting with different people. All of that comes from the experience I had in New Zealand. Maybe subconsciously I always knew these things, but they aren't really things you say out loud. I definitely know I can communicate well but this experience gave me some good examples I could explain in job interviews, rather than saying I did a class presentation. Like with improvisation, this one time our car broke down in the middle of nowhere and I had to help figure out how to get us back to civilization. That's the kind of thing that I think will impact me in the long run. Studying abroad definitely shaped my self-awareness, the values I have, the person that I am and my personality. Something related to the CED major is learning what we are worth and what skills we can bring to the table. Going to New Zealand provided me with enough experiences to show myself and others that I have all sorts of different skills that I can bring to the table.

I think I would go back. I think that there are a lot of things still left to be done there. New Zealand is such a beautiful country and I met so many great people, who are not necessarily from New Zealand, but I think I could expand my friend base there and

Claire has told me, “Anytime you want to come back, you have a place to stay!” So I definitely would like to go back. There are still a lot of things to do, I haven’t bungee jumped there! I need to do that or go to see Lord of the Rings things. I would suggest for anyone to go there especially if they’re willing to go on an adventure since it’s so far away, it takes over 24 hours worth of flying to get there.

One thing that I didn’t mention that I gained from that experience was a “why not” attitude. Just being able to recognize what’s important, what’s not important, and when to jump in head first and do something; like renting a car, driving all around an island and camping along the way. I think that studying abroad is like a “whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” sort of idea. The attitude is, “I’m here and I’m only going to be here for a semester, so whatever opportunities come up, as long as I can financially afford it, I’m going to do it.” I think this attitude has transferred back here. I don’t want to be cliché and say that life is short, but it’s true and we’re young and there are so many things that people shy away from because they don’t think that they should or could do it. I think that being in New Zealand and gaining that “why not” attitude is like, “Why not go for a hike later, and why not take a bus from here to there and staying in a hostel overnight and eat weird food.” I think I ate barbequed sheep brain at a food festival and all kinds of stuff.

I would suggest studying abroad if not only to get into that mind set and to bring it back and continue to do that in the US. I think people are on a really strict path of going through high school, college, getting degrees, jobs and a family. They have this American dream and believe it has to apply to them and they will do whatever it takes to fit into that idea. I think that studying abroad helped me break out of that. I think I already had that mentality, but studying abroad definitely encouraged me. People view it as this time where a whole different side of their personality comes out. Many times they are somewhere they will never be again and are with people they may never see again. I think that encourages a whole different side of you to come out, because you’re not afraid of continued judgment from those people because you’re only going to be around them for a certain period of time. But I think that people shouldn’t just have that mindset when they are abroad or when they are in Vegas. Within a certain means, you can have that all

the time. If you're constantly concerned about someone judging you or maybe because you've done a certain thing, you won't get the job you wanted. Well, when are you ever going to get to do that thing again? When will that come up again? When are you going to be able to take that risk or opportunity? That really rubbed off on me in New Zealand and I've brought that mindset back with me and that has spurred me to continue to want to work abroad.

I'm only 21, I'm young and this is the time for me to join the Peace Corps and live in a hut in the middle of sub-Saharan Africa for two years. Bringing that mindset back from New Zealand has helped me to take the bull by the horns and do whatever I want, whatever I think is going to make me happy and whether or not that fits within the idea of what should make someone happy, it doesn't matter anymore. There are some experiences you can only gain if you put yourself in the mindset of "why not" and then bring it back. I don't know if that is something you can do within the confines of a regular 4 year university plan in the US.

Chapter 6

Findings and Discussion

Background

Each student profile is complex, unique and reflective. The data I have gathered is in no way conclusive or generalizable regarding all undergraduate students at Penn State who study abroad. That is not the purpose of these profiles. Together, the profiles provide insight into how the students interviewed for this research perceive studying abroad has already and will continue to influence their lives. The findings raise questions and suggest further research that should be done on this topic by interviewing more students at Penn State and at other universities as well. I have gleaned and synthesized information from the interviews about student motivations, expectations and outcomes of their time abroad, as well as their sense of the meaning and significance of their international experiences. Taken individually, the interviews are in-depth and reflective accounts of five students' experiences studying abroad. Taken collectively, they invite others to join the discussion about studying abroad via these student profiles and stories.

Motivations

Elliot Shibley declared in his profile, "I wanted to go abroad and see firsthand how cultures interact...not through movies or documentaries or reading. You need to live it." Several other students echoed this statement by expressing their personal beliefs in the importance of lived, authentic and new experiences in other countries, with people of different cultures. In today's world, we are connected through technology and trade to

almost every part of the world. Some people are no longer content to hear about other countries on the news or see pictures online; they want to experience it firsthand. The students I interviewed explained various personal attributes or tendencies which they believe motivated them to study abroad, and pursue a firsthand international experience. What follows should get at why authentic lived experience is so important to these students.

Intrinsic Factors. I observed several common themes among the students regarding why they believe they chose to study abroad. Each student mentioned their desire to travel. Taoran said, “I’m a traveler, so I want to experience every continent.” Elliot also expressed a similar goal: to travel to every continent by the time he is 30. Marvin described his knack for traveling. Ericka grew up as a military child and she said, “all the traveling...played a big role in my development and I want to continue that and broaden my knowledge of the world through travel. Lastly, Monica said, “I think my intrinsic desire to see the world and learn more about other cultures was a big factor.” Not all the students explained where their desire for travel comes from, but each of them recognized it was a major motivator for them to study abroad.

The “knack for traveling,” as each student expressed, leads into another theme—appreciation for new cultures and the desire to experience them in an immersive and authentic way. Several of the students indicated they sought opportunities that would drive them off the beaten path and enable them to have some truly unique and genuine cultural experiences. Monica described how her study abroad program helped her pursue authentic experiences. Her program (CIEE) planned many trips for the students and arranged for local guides to teach them about the city of Seville. She said that she was able to learn things that she would never know if she went to Seville as a tourist. Certainly the program structure has a significant impact on what opportunities are available, but the student’s goals and desires for the trip are incredibly important to determine whether or not they will elect to take advantage of opportunities. For example, Monica explained that a lot of other students chose not to attend the planned trips and in

response to that she said, “I went on all the trips and tried to have as many of the cultural experiences that were offered to me.”

Elliot explained that he sees the bigger picture in life and as a geographer he enjoys seeing how cultures interact and how different people live their lives. In one of his stories, he described an experience getting to know the city of Zurich with a local citizen. He said, “All three days that I was there with him, he showed me around. I got to see some stuff that I wouldn’t have seen if I had gone by myself or just looked at a tourist map.” Both Monica and Elliot indicated the value of learning from local citizens. Marvin talked about his love of Spanish-speaking culture, which encouraged him to study abroad in Argentina so he could immerse himself in the language and culture every day. The desire to pursue culturally authentic and non-touristy experiences encouraged several of these students to study abroad.

Another common attribute among some of the students I interviewed was their perceived need to “change sceneries.” Ericka described this by saying, “I studied abroad the spring of my sophomore year because by then I was getting really antsy and wanted a change of scenery.” She accredits her desire for a change of scenery to her military upbringing; she was accustomed to moving every two years. In a similar vein, Marvin said, “I am the type of person that needs a change of scenery every now and then. I’m a person who likes to mix things up.” This quote suggests that there is a certain *type* of person who for varying reasons needs to experience a change of place and pace every once in a while. Studying abroad can fulfill this urge to find new scenery and provide this type of student with the mobility they seek.

I have summarized the most prevalent themes among the students I interviewed regarding how students perceive intrinsic factors motivated them to study abroad. There were many unique personal motivations among the students as well. For example, Taoran studied abroad in South Africa during the time she was studying abroad at Penn State. She desired to pursue this additional international experience in order to get to know Americans and develop meaningful relationships with other Penn State students. Elliot conveyed another unique motivation- his appreciation of nature. He explained his love of natural environments and said, “I’ve always been attracted to the natural aspects of

different areas.” In several of his stories from Germany, Tanzania and Costa Rica, he included many details on the natural environments and recounted various meaningful experiences he had discovering a place’s natural beauty. I mention these motivations in order to reiterate the uniqueness of every student’s international experience.

Extrinsic Factors. Among the students I interviewed, there was a great variety in the extrinsic factors which they believe influenced their decision to study abroad. As displayed in the Conceptual Diagram of Motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic factors influence each other. The intrinsic factors that led these five students to study abroad are unique, and since they influence the extrinsic factors that encourage students to study abroad, it is logical that there would be variety among the extrinsic factors as well. Additionally, each student described different extrinsic factors because of the distinct and unique nature of each student’s undergraduate career. Given these two main reasons, it is difficult to generalize the wide variety of extrinsic factors that motivated these five students to study abroad.

However, there are several broad themes that emerged from the students’ interviews regarding extrinsic factors that motivated them to study abroad. Each student mentioned that they wanted to study abroad to meet some type of academic goal. The specific goals varied among the students. For example, Elliot chose to travel to Costa Rica and study abroad in Tanzania because he wanted to learn and apply what he was studying at Penn State to real-world situations. His time in Germany was required through the Landscape Architecture Departments at Penn State. Ericka chose her program in New Zealand so that she would be able to take interesting classes not offered at Penn State and use them for the specialization required in her major. Taoran chose to study in the US so she could study psychology and get a degree from an American university.

Several of the students I interviewed specifically mentioned that they wanted to study abroad to improve their language skills. Monica and Marvin both wanted to get better at Spanish and Taoran desired to gain skills and confidence in speaking English. Miller’s study (cited earlier) found that improving language skills was the most frequently cited reason that students chose to study abroad. The next most commonly

cited reason was to understand and promote other cultures in their respective majors (Miller, 1993). Overall, each student I interviewed desired to engage in new cultures and experiences in the context of their undergraduate career and chose international programs that allowed for involvement, engagement and pursuit of new opportunities.

Expectations and Outcomes

Similar to the extrinsic factors that motivated these five students to study abroad, their perceived expectations of their study abroad experiences are also extremely varied. The most common expectations among these students are culture shock and impact. Most students expected they would experience culture shock over the course of their study abroad program in one form or another. Students varied in their preparation for what to expect; much of this variation is due to what information the program offered before the student began the program. For example, both Marvin and Monica received packets of information to brief them on some cultural differences they should be aware of before they traveled to their study abroad destinations.

Several of the students expected that they would experience adventures during their time abroad. For example, Ericka mentioned that she was anticipating a lot of opportunities to explore New Zealand and have adventures. Elliot also indicated that for all three of his study abroad experiences, he was expecting to have unique and exciting opportunities. Every student expected that their time abroad would have some impact on their life. The following sections of analysis will discuss this topic more in depth, but it is important to note that each student anticipated their experience would impact their life.

Goals. Several of the students I interviewed described goals that they set for themselves regarding their study abroad experience. The three most commonly expressed goals include experiencing cultural immersion, venturing outside of one's comfort zone and learning a language. Monica said that her goal of cultural immersion encouraged her to participate in all the activities offered by her study abroad program. Other students who

sought to experience cultural immersion made efforts to engage in local activities and traditions as well as discuss various cultural concepts with local people. Marvin explained that through learning more about Argentina from various experiences throughout the program and living with his host family, he gained, “his own sense of Argentine pride.”

Students who desired to get out of their comfort zones articulated that studying abroad was the perfect opportunity to participate in a new culture, learn or refine a language, eat new foods, visit new places and so on. Each student pursued this desire through various means, but each of the five students reflected that leaving their comfort zone was a personal goal and that it somehow influenced their behavior abroad. Taoran chose her study abroad program in South Africa because she wanted a challenge. She set goals for herself that pushed her to interact with American students and become better at speaking English. As Taoran indicated and I have already reported in the section on extrinsic factors, many students set goals for themselves to improve their foreign language skills. Marvin declared, “I went to Argentina with learning Spanish as my main priority...that was the most important thing.” Similarly, Monica made learning Spanish one of her main goals.

The connection between goal-setting and behavior is valuable to analyze because many scholars have reported a strong positive correlation between goal-setting and achieving desired behavior. However, self-efficacy also affects whether or not the individual will successfully achieve their goal. For example, Monica expressed her desire to improve her Spanish but also said that the language barrier was much harder than she expected, and that she did not have much confidence in speaking Spanish. This also demonstrates how expectations influence behavior. She did not expect that speaking Spanish would be so difficult, so she felt discouraged in her attempts to speak Spanish.

Challenges. Most students encountered at least one challenge during their time abroad. Some students described how difficult it was to be separated from family, friends and significant others during their time abroad. Elliot recalled a few instances throughout his trips abroad where he greatly missed his girlfriend. He told me about a trip he and several

others made to a sandbar and said, “That isolation made me think of my girlfriend and realize how far away we actually were and how much I missed her.” Marvin expressed how much he missed his girlfriend, as well as his family and friends at Penn State.

Another challenge which I have previously mentioned was the language barrier; Marvin, Monica and Taoran all cited this as a major difficulty. Ericka enlightened me about the challenges she faced by being a racial minority in New Zealand. She said, “I realized when you’re outside the US or even in some parts of the US, people see you as the color of your skin and that is always how it’s going to be.” This was not a challenge Ericka was expecting to face and in the following section I will discuss how expectations may influence outcomes.

Outcomes. In this section, I am specifically referring to “outcomes” as specific events or experiences that happened during each student’s time abroad, not as broader results from their experience (this will appear in the next section). Every student had certain expectations, both specific and general, regarding their study abroad experience.

Regarding culture shock, Elliot was not as overwhelmed by the cultural differences he witnessed in Tanzania as he had expected he would be. Marvin and Monica had opposite reactions. They both indicated that no amount of briefing packets could have prepared them for actually experiencing cultural differences. Regarding the interpretation of time in Spain, Monica said, “It’s so much different to expect something than to experience it. You can read about it but it’s different when you actually need to get somewhere a half hour late, because you’re not going to get there on time.” This could imply that no amount of preparing or expecting will affect the outcomes of an individual’s experience abroad.

Each individual’s expectations uniquely influenced outcomes of their trip, however there is not a clear correlation; the importance of expectations also depends on many of the previously analyzed aspects of a study abroad experience. For every student, many of their expectations were met, some were not and many unexpected outcomes occurred. Although that is a fairly simple and straightforward assessment, due to the

uniqueness of each student's expectations and experience, it is not possible to make assumptions about how expectations affect outcomes.

Meaning and Significance

I asked each student to reflect on their time abroad and how they perceive their experience has and will continue to impact their lives. My questions encouraged them to discuss ways their study abroad experience influenced them immediately upon their return home, how it is still influencing their life today and how they perceive it will affect their future. Each student addressed these questions thoughtfully and reflectively.

Short-Term Impacts. There were several broad themes regarding how students perceive that their time abroad influences their life in the short-term. Initial impacts that students noticed after their return from studying abroad include habitual changes, new interests, changing relationships, desire to advocate for study abroad programs and new ways of thinking about their home country. To cite a few specific examples, Elliot explained that in Germany, "If you eat right-handed, you are supposed to cut with your right hand too. You're not supposed to switch utensils, so I learned to eat with my left hand. I still do that every time I eat." Monica noticed that she has been a lot later for events and appointments than she was before her trip; she has become more laidback. Ericka adopted a love for rugby. Marvin knew that his relationship with his girlfriend was more serious when he returned. He said, "I told my mom that if things worked out with my girlfriend Abby, I was going to marry her." Each student said that after their trip, they recognized the importance and significance of studying abroad and began to encourage others to study abroad. Taoran reflected on the differences between South Africa and China, and was able to more critically analyze environmental policies and practices in her country.

Long-Term Impacts. This question prompted many long responses because this is the phase each student is in now; they are reflecting on how their experience abroad is

impacting their life now and will affect their life in the future. Several students said that their time abroad made them very conscious of their own wasteful practices and initiated or encouraged a desire to live in a more environmentally-conscious manner. Almost every student indicated that their experience has influenced future plans for their life such as where they want to live and what sort of career they will pursue. Inspired by the work she did in conservation, Taoran told me that she began to research careers in China that focus on conservation and environmental preservation. She said, "It gave me a new idea of what I can do in the future." She is not alone in this response. Elliot discussed the idea of living abroad, or in an urban area, which he had not considered before spending a semester in Germany. Monica and Ericka also expressed interest in an internationally focused career.

I also asked the students to specifically reflect on any impacts that their experience abroad has had on their personality, attitude or beliefs. In various ways, every student underwent some kind of personal growth during their time abroad. Several broad themes include becoming more comfortable with new experiences, practicing independence and gaining soft skills such as improvisation or flexibility. Elliot and Taoran both described how through their time abroad and engaging in new activities and witnessing different cultures, they became more comfortable with new experiences. For Taoran, her experience in South Africa radically affected her personal development; it gave her much more confidence speaking English and interacting with Americans. Marvin explained many ways in which he grew personally, especially in independence, during his time abroad. He said, "Being in Argentina has been part of my development into a man and some personal epiphanies." Ericka told me about various soft skills she gained from her time in New Zealand that have helped her while interviewing for jobs.

Each student was able to identify many short and long-term impacts they believe resulted from their experiences abroad. I believe that the reflective nature of the interview encouraged students to analyze their own experience and discover some truths about themselves and their experiences that they may not have fully understood before. I benefitted immensely from hearing each student's story and I hope that Marvin, Monica, Elliot, Taoran and Ericka all found their interviews beneficial as well.

Chapter 7

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the discussion of findings, this section will make recommendations for future research and provide further insight into my research project. I will reflect on the implications of my results and discuss the broader context of my research. Additionally I will explain ways in which this research can be applied and spark conversation within the topic of study abroad, and international experiences in general.

I suggest that further research should be done to understand how students perceive the impacts of their study abroad experiences. It would be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study where the researcher would interview students before and after their time abroad. This would add an interesting dimension to the study- for example being able to compare more accurately what the student expected before the trip and what actually happened. The students I interviewed were able to discuss their expectations prior to the trip, but their assessment of those is not extremely precise since they had already returned from their trips. I recommend that more students should be interviewed, both at Penn State and other universities. Additionally, it would very valuable for future research to interview faculty and staff involved in study abroad programs. From my experience abroad, I have learned that faculty also learn and change throughout their time abroad.

Looking beyond, but stimulated by my research, here are some themes and ideas to be considered by universities for further research and discussion. I think it is important to understand how studying abroad shapes students, not just individually but also in terms of society and what type of citizens these students will be in the future. This could be another opportunity to complete a lengthy longitudinal study to follow certain students before, during and after their study abroad experience in order to see what career paths they follow, where they live and so on. Given the reality of globalization, we are

connected to people and places all over the world so it is essential for university students to learn about different people and places in order to be fully engaged and informed citizens in the global society. Universities should study the relationship between students' international experiences and the effects on society. Within the context of my research, I have seen how studying abroad creates globally-minded and more culturally-aware students. I believe more time, money and effort should be invested to develop programs that encourage students to study abroad and facilitate international experiences.

With the conclusion of my project, I have obtained a greater understanding of how students perceive their study abroad experiences, what factors shape these perceptions and the short and long-term impacts. Also, I expect that the information I have gathered and analyzed will be useful to several different groups of people. Future undergraduate students will benefit from reading personal narratives of other students who have travelled abroad. This may even help them make their own choices about where they would like to study abroad or what type of program they desire. The students who I have interviewed also benefited from being able to reflect on their experience abroad. Program directors and administrators in the Penn State UOGP will find this information useful to analyze and possibly modify developmental and organization aspects of study abroad programs. These student narratives could be utilized in a focus group for program directors to discuss and analyze real student experiences. This would help administrators and directors clearly see a few examples of how students perceive their study abroad experiences have impacted them. Based on this research, there are greater opportunities for universities to enhance student learning. Studying abroad is a fantastic tool to do this and can greatly enhance a student's undergraduate career. Lastly, this data will enrich the existing body of literature on studying abroad by documenting unique and in depth narratives. This research will set the direction and highlight important themes for future analysis of the impacts of studying abroad.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, A. (2003). Women and cultural learning in Costa Rica: reading the contexts. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 9, 21-52.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179-211.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist*, 44 (9), 1175-1184.
- Chieffo, L. (2000). *Determinants of student participation in study abroad programs at the University of Delaware: a quantitative study*. Retrieved from Proquest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 9982678)
- Forgues, D. (2005). *A study of the relationship of study abroad and students' attitudes toward diversity and culture*. Retrieved from Proquest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 3174147)
- Hsu, Jeremy. (2008). The secrets of story-telling. *Scientific American Mind*, August 2008, 46-51.
- Iqbal, Z. (2012). *Globalization*. [PowerPoint Slides].
- Kitsantas, A. (2004). Studying abroad: the role of college student's goals on the development of cross-cultural skills and global understanding. *College Student Journal*, 38(3), 441-452.
- Landau, J. & Moore, D.C. (2001). Towards reconciliation in the motherland: race, class, nationality, gender, and the complexities of the American student present at the University of Ghana, Legon. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 7, 25-29.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Miller, E. (February, 1993). *Culture shock: A student's perspective of study abroad and the importance of promoting study abroad programs*. Paper presented at The Annual Intercultural and International Communication Conference, Miami, FL.
- Miner, S. (2008). *The experience of becoming mindful of culture via study abroad*.

Retrieved from Proquest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 1456199)

Peters, S. J., Alter, T. R., & Schwartzbach, N. (2010). *Democracy and higher education: Traditions and stories of civic engagement*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press

The Institute of International Education. (2012). *Open Doors Report* [Data on student flows into and out of the US]. <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>

The Pennsylvania State University Office of Global Programs. (2011). *International Profile 2011*. [Data on Education Abroad]. www.global.psu.edu

Tollefson, N. (2000). Classroom applications of cognitive theories of motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 12(1), 63-83.hyu7

Whitbourne, S. (2011). Motivation: The why's of behavior. *Psychology Today*, Oct. 29 2011.

ACADEMIC VITA

Alison Muscato

ajmuscato@gmail.com
808 S. Pugh Street
State College PA 16801

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA **2010-Present**
College of Agricultural Sciences Bachelor of Science in Community, Environment and Development;
International Development Option
College of Liberal Arts Minor in International Studies
Schreyer Honors College
Parks & People Program: Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve, Eastern Cape, South Africa **Spring 2013**
Parks & People Program: Udzungwa Mountains National Park, Tanzania **Summer 2012**

HONORS

Dean's List **2010-Present**
Schreyer Honors College Academic Excellence Scholarship **2010-2014**
Galen Dreibelbis Endowment for Excellence in Agriculture **2010-2013**

ACTIVITIES

Reformed University Fellowship Leadership Team **January 2011-Present**

- Mentor a small group of girls and lead weekly group discussions as well as plan other events
- Develop future goals for the organization, with a focus on building relationships and connections with people

Community Environment and Development Club **August 2010-May 2012**

- Participated in events to educate students and the local community about environmental issues as well as partnered with various community service organizations

WORK EXPERIENCE

Potomac Farm Market **July 2008-August 2013**

- Displayed and sold fresh produce as well as managed customer relations

Lion Line **September-December 2012**

- Conducted alumni relations calls and fundraised for The Pennsylvania State University

PROJECTS

Research Proposal on Non-Profit Organization: Eastern Cape, South Africa **March-April 2013**

- Developed a sustainable framework for long-term success of Non-Profit Organizations

Research on Conservation and Livelihoods: Eastern Cape, South Africa **January-March 2013**

- Employed ecological and social surveys in 3 villages outside the Manubi Forest Conservation Area

Research Proposal for a Community Marketplace: Mang'ula, Tanzania **May-June 2012**

- Created a plan for a community market place to address economic and social tensions between the community and the neighboring Udzungwa Mountains National Park

SKILLS

Certified in the Natural Step Sustainability Course

Limited Working Proficiency in Spanish