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THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR LEISURE ACTIVITIES DURING STUDY ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

As we become a more global society, more students are choosing to study abroad during their undergraduate career. While many studies document the various benefits of doing so, there are few studies that have assessed the role of non-structured leisure experiences during a study abroad program. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of structured and non-structured extracurricular activities on a study abroad program, the benefits of non-structured leisure and compare and contrast the outcomes between structured and non-structured extracurricular activities. Ten students who participated in a non-structured leisure activity while studying abroad, and represented the minority culture during that time, were interviewed to gain insights regarding their experiences and to answer study questions. Following recruitment and interviewing, transcripts were coded for emergent themes and subthemes. Thematic coding revealed that while the roles and outcomes of structured and non-structured activities differed, they were also mutually reinforcing. An outcome of structured activities was that they were more likely to meet student expectations, however, program limitations remained. Benefits of non-structured activities, including feeling a sense of autonomy, building lasting relationships, and experiencing the culture from a different perspective led to outcomes of personal connections with local people, immersion, greater responsibility for the student and professional development. Responses suggested the students go outside of their comfort zone and continue a hobby while studying abroad, study abroad programs continue to be supportive of students that want to venture beyond the program activities and market non-structured activities in marketing, and researchers further explore how leisure pursuits independent from the study abroad program affect a student's overall experience with a larger sample size.

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“The brave explorers who went into the unknown made available to their contemporaries knowledge of what the world was really like.” – Goeldner & Ritchie

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Study abroad is becoming a more integral part of higher education given the increase in numbers of students choosing to be educated in a foreign country during their undergraduate career (Institute of International Education, 2018). The impact of participating in study abroad is considerable for study abroad programs, universities and researchers. Providing intense immersion in classrooms, living options and opportunities for extracurricular involvement in the host country can lead to significant impact on the individual. Students have the potential to further develop cultural sensitivity and personal growth through experiential learning. Later in their lives, individuals who have studied abroad also identify their study abroad experience as a source of increased personal growth and career development (Dwyer & Peters, 1999). However, there is “limited amounts of research regarding leisure activities pursued out of the classroom” (Hartman, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore how pursuing non-structured leisure activities while studying abroad impacts the experience as a whole, as well as how they compare to activities offered by the program, to provide insight for students and study abroad programs about their value, and suggestions for further research in this area.

Background

The number of university students in the United States studying abroad has steadily increased at roughly 2% per year since 1990 (Institute of International Education, 2018). One in

ten undergraduate students from the United States study abroad before graduating and 332,727 did so during 2017 (Institute of International Education, 2018). A study done by the National Center for Education Statistics provides a demographic breakdown of students who study abroad and measures changes between 2004 and 2014. It shows that “two thirds of students studying abroad are female” and “nearly 84% are white” (Perez, 2017). Still, there has been an increase in minority students and students with disabilities going abroad within recent years (USA Study Abroad, 2017). Western Europe remains the most popular destination, with most US students traveling to the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, or Germany (Institute of International Education, 2018). The increase of popularity and accessibility of study abroad may be due to the variety of program options, regarding their housing, purpose and duration.

Students may often choose to live in either a homestay or student hostel, although homestays are considered advantageous for its direct cultural and language immersion (Wang, 2018). Categorizations of study abroad program duration includes short-term, mid-length or long-term. Short-term programs usually take place during the summer and are eight weeks or less. They are also shown to be the most common for US students (USA Study Abroad, 2017). Mid-length programs include those that are for one semester (Institute of International Education, 2018). Long-term means the individual is studying abroad for the entire academic or calendar year (Institute of International Education, 2018). Purpose of travel also varies between students and their program of choice. Students may participate in programs for academic credit, or “non-credit work, internships, volunteering, and research” (Institute of International Education, 2018). Regardless of program type and duration, students experience levels of direct contact with the host culture that provide an opportunity for intercultural development.

Intercultural Sensitivity

Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 2004) outlines the continuum of experiences an individual may have when interacting with people from other cultures. Commonly, there is a transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, when an individual's perspective shifts from seeing their own culture as "central to reality" to being "one organization of reality among many viable possibilities" (Bennett, 2004, p. 1). One can progress through the process during study abroad, if the appropriate measures are taken to ensure immersion. A brief description of each part of the transition is included below.

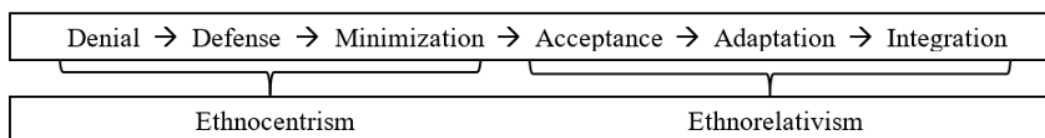


Figure 1: Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (formatted by Grace Mannix)

Denial occurs when someone's perspective is entirely monocultural, so they do not recognize other cultures' beliefs, values, and behaviors as real or true. Defense "is the state in which one's own culture (or adopted culture) is experienced as the only viable" and often involves positive stereotyping of one's own culture and negative stereotyping of others (Bennett, 2004, p. 4). An individual experiences Minimization when they make the differences feel familiar and fails to realize how their beliefs, values, and behaviors are influenced by the context of their upbringing.

People at Acceptance understand that their culture is one part of a greater whole, and can identify how different cultures operate in various human interactions (Bennett, 2004).

Adaptation is achieved when someone is able to "express their alternative cultural experience in culturally appropriate feelings and behavior" (Bennett, 2004, p. 7). Adaptation also refers to the

“mutual adjustment” experienced by the dominant and non-dominant culture groups. Finally, integration involves a they constant shift between cultural perspectives without losing one’s own sense of being, so people in this stage often serve as “cultural bridge-builders in intercultural situations” (Bennett, 2004, p. 9).

It would take time to progress through each stage of the Developmental Model considering how it requires a change of mind and perspective. Still, it is important for individuals to achieve as our society becomes more intercultural. Study abroad is the ideal opportunity for this transition to occur given the life-stage of students that most commonly participate, which entails an open-ness to exploration.

Higher Education International Programs

University-level study abroad programs are an opportune time and place to progress through the transition described in Bennett’s Development Model. “Students participating in study abroad programming are in the emerging adulthood phase, a time when committing to specific values concerning love, work, and worldviews is not necessary” (Hartman, 2011, p. 2). For this reason, they can explore other identities and perspectives. A study done by the University of California, Riverside showed how American students returning from study abroad demonstrated “higher levels of international political concern, cross-cultural interest, and cultural cosmopolitanism” and “reported significantly more positive, yet also more critical attitudes toward their own country” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988, p. 13). This demonstrates the openness and elasticity of the college demographic, making it a crucial transformation time into cultural competence.

The potential skills and benefits students can acquire from studying abroad are well-researched and the burden of evidence suggests positive effects. Many studies have been done showing common effects that occur both during and soon after the experience. For example, the *Journal of Studies in International Education* cited language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity as outcomes for the individual. The Georgetown Consortium Project performed a study reporting the same information ten years later (Franklin, 2010). However, given the level of variety of study abroad programs available, there is debate over which types of programs are most effective in yielding the aforementioned benefits for the individual (McCabe, 2001). Consider the following table that classifies various types of study abroad programs based on factors such as: duration, language competence, housing, and guidance for reflection (Engle & Engle, 2015). It demonstrates how many different kinds of study abroad programs are available to students, and their variety in levels of immersion.

While all of the program types are different, their common denominator is learning style. Study abroad programs offer students an opportunity to reinforce their traditional, in-class academics with experiential learning. The Experiential Learning Theory defines it as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 44). It is a holistic style in which students are forced to experience, reflect, think, and act as a response to the given situation (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Experiential learning is beneficial considering it is “internalized more rapidly and to a more permanent extent than the classroom methods most commonly used” (Henthorne, Miller, & Hudson, 2008, p. 51). This is not meant as a slight to traditional learning practices. It is simply to demonstrate how study abroad provides an opportunity for students to learn about another culture in a more memorable,

effective manner, and certain types of study abroad programs can be more effective at this

(Henthorne, Miller, & Hudson, 2008).

Program Components	Level One: Study Tour	Level Two: Short-Term Study	Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program	Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program	Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion
Duration	Several days to a few weeks	3-8 weeks, summer programs	Semester	Semester to academic year	Semester to academic year
Entry target-language competence	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Pre-advanced to advanced	Advanced
Language used in coursework	English	English and target-language	English and target-language	Predominantly target-language	Target-language in all curricular and extra-curricular activities
Academic work context	Home institution facility	In-house or institute for foreign students	Student group or with other international students	In house student group	Local norms, partial, or complete direct enrollment
Housing	Collective	Collective and/or home stay	Collective, homestay visit, homestay rental	Home stay rental or integration home stay	Individual integration homestay
Provisions for cultural interaction, experiential learning	None	None	None or limited	Optional participation in occasional integration activities	Required regular participation in cultural integration program, extensive direct cultural contact via service-learning work internship
Guided reflection on cultural experience	None	Orientation program	Orientation program	Orientation program, initial and ongoing	Orientation program, mentoring, on-going orientation/course in cross-cultural perspectives, reflective writing and research

Figure 2: Engle and Engle Classification of Study Abroad Program Types (formatted by Grace Mannix)

Benefits of Study Abroad

Research shows that benefits realized by an individual from his/her study abroad program are invaluable to aspects of their being. A study done by Mary Dwyer, Ph.D. and Courtney Peters of The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES Abroad) surveyed IES Abroad alumni from 1950 to 1999 to measure how the individual's personal growth, academic commitment, and career development was affected by their experience. Participants responded positively across the board. Regardless of how long they stayed in-country, respondents reported feeling an increased sense of self-confidence and maturity, enhanced interest in academic study (especially of foreign language), and acquired skill sets that influenced their career path (Dwyer & Peters, 1999).

Open-ended responses in their study also identified possible strategies for improving the study abroad experience. Survey results showed that studying abroad for a longer period of time, such as one full calendar or academic year, produces a more intense realization of benefits for an individual (Dwyer & Peters, 1999) than trips of a shorter duration. Furthermore, they discovered that individuals were more likely to continue using their language after completing the program if they lived in a homestay rather than an apartment or residence hall with other students (Dwyer & Peters, 1999). Living in-country longer in a more closely acquainted way suggests that sustained direct contact is the key to a successful, rewarding study abroad experience. What the study does not explore, however, is how the activities that occur beyond the classroom could be another avenue for students to obtain direct contact while studying abroad. A student's interest in leisure and recreation does not necessarily stop during study abroad, so discussion of such experiences is warranted.

Labor and Leisure

In his thesis *The Importance of Being Lazy*, Al Gini discusses the juxtaposition of labor and leisure. He argues that working has become a “fetish” for United States citizens to the extent at which people embellish how much time they dedicate to their job (Gini, 2003). Although research suggests people work less now than in the past, a study done by Robinson and Godbey demonstrated how people self-report longer hours at work (Gini, 2003). Women responded in interviews that they “put in 40.4 hours per week on the job, and men claimed they put in 46.2 hours” (Gini, 2003, p. 3-4). However, both groups recorded fewer hours than they initially reported in personal journal entries. Gini hypothesizes that time has emerged as a significant American cultural value, so people feel more important when they say they are busy. Former editor of the travel magazine *Escape*, Joe Robinson, also says “we’re the most vacation-starved country in the industrial world” (Gini, 2003, p. 6).

The amount of work that United States citizens burden themselves with makes leisure time that much more desirable and beneficial. In his journal, Gini refers to an article written by Mark Harris about children’s play. He says:

‘It’s the way (children) ingest the world. It’s the way they learn... they create a map of reality and come to know and define the other players in the game... Play is one of the ways we become human. Play, for both children and adults alike, helps us unlock the door to the world and ourselves’ (Gini, 2003, p. 8).

Harris and Gini are suggesting that leisure time helps people ground themselves amidst their busy lives. The spontaneity and freedom from responsibility that defines leisure allows individuals to return to themselves temporarily before returning to a professional influence. Leisure also serves as a framework through which people can interpret their surroundings. With

that being said, the work and play collaborate to influence peoples' behaviors and choices. One could not be appreciated properly without the knowledge of the other. As Gini writes, "As adults, we are defined by *our work and our play*" (p. 9). The implications of this study are that United States college students may be more interested in studying abroad, but might opt for shorter program lengths more often due to their perceived lack of free time, which makes it that much more crucial to create opportunities for direct contact with the host culture.

Extracurricular Activities

While there is extensive research on the impact of studying abroad, there is little enquiry on the role of extracurricular activities in such an experience. One recent study done by Langley and Breese (2005), US college sophomores participating in a year-long program in Ireland were asked about how their out-of-class pursuits helped them learn about the host culture, and how they "influenced students' attitudes toward cultures other than their own" (p. 313). Students got involved in various activities, such as sports teams, theater-related clubs, and nonprofit organizations. Those interviewed reported that interacting with locals outside of class and participating in events organized by the program led to more strongly developed relationships, an enhanced understanding of the culture, lower chances of judging and/or stereotyping other cultures, and a more critical and appreciative view of their own culture (Langley & Breese, 2005). This study builds upon that by looking at students' experiences participating in leisure while abroad across a variety of programs and countries.

It is also important to consider the life-stage of students going abroad and the role that extracurricular activities play during that time. Emerging Adulthood, as described by Bohnert,

Aikins and Edidin, is “the time between 18 and 25 years of age, and is marked by instability, a lack of adult responsibilities, and commitments that afford individuals the opportunity and time to explore prospective life courses related to identity, work and worldviews” (Bohnert, Wargo Aikins, & Edidin, 2007, p. 191). Their study explores the relation between common emotions felt during this period and those experienced during a transition into college, such as loneliness from “the absence of established social networks as well as the challenge of forming a new one” (Bohnert, Wargo Aikins, & Edidin, 2007, p. 191). The researchers also examined how extracurricular involvement impacted those emotions. Their findings indicated that greater involvement in extracurricular activities, primarily sports, lead to better friendship quality, especially for those with a history of loneliness during adolescence (Bohnert, Wargo Aikins, & Edidin, 2007). Although the study looked specifically at the transition to college, it is important to acknowledge a similar process with studying abroad. There is also a possibility of greater satisfaction after finding a sought out independence through free choice of recreation activities beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, enjoyment as a result of participating in leisure activities has been thoroughly researched. There are other effects, such as to skill development, self-concept and identity less commonly talked about (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). For example, I love to play soccer, and was determined to continue doing so when I studied abroad in St. Petersburg. I had not considered the impact that joining a local soccer club would have on my experience when I initially asked for a program faculty member to connect me with a team. Once practices started, I realized that it was going to be more than just an extracurricular activity. The team consisted of roughly fifteen girls around my age. I was the only American student, so my teammates would often practice their English with me. As they became more comfortable with me, and I with the

Russian language, we began seeing each other more outside of practices and games. They included me in the team tradition of enjoying post-game dinners together at the nearest KFC Restaurant. We went shopping together, I met their families, and a few girls even joined me and my fellow American students on a day-trip to a nearby city. Having a mutual interest with girls my age in Russia contributed significantly to my ability to communicate and sense of identity while there. Would it be possible for other study abroad students to have experienced these outcomes from participating in non-structured extracurricular activities?

Purpose of Study

In his article about “achieving a global perspective”, McCabe (2001) raises an excellent question: How can we maximize development of students as “citizens of today” during their study abroad given the many kinds of programs available? As a framework through which people can interpret their surroundings, it is possible that leisure could be a conduit. The purpose of this study is to explore how participating in recreational activities during leisure time might impact an individual’s overall experience while studying abroad. It also aims to distinguish between the roles and outcomes of structured and non-structured extracurricular activities, as well as identify how participating in non-structured activities independent from the program could benefit the student.

Research Questions

1. From the perspective of the student, what was the role of structured and unstructured extracurricular activities in their study abroad program?

2. What are the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities during non-structured free time for students in a study abroad program?
3. How do outcomes of extracurricular activities offered by the study abroad program compare to extracurricular activities pursued by the student in their non-structured free time?

Study Significance

Traveling internationally for study abroad can produce many positive outcomes. However, it is a transitional experience where some level of culture shock is common. Culture shock is defined as “a form of anxiety which results from the misunderstanding of commonly perceived and understood signs and symbols of social interaction” and may “encompass feelings of helplessness; irritability; and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured, or disregarded” (Adler, 1975, p. 13). It is important for students participating in study abroad programs to manage their anxiety in their new environment so they can maintain a sense of identity throughout their experience. Participating in leisure activities results in physiological, psychological, and social benefits that can counteract the negative impacts of culture shock. These activities may serve as either a break from daily routine or as a restorative practice. Regardless, pursuing leisure activities “promotes a variety of social and physical resources that allow individuals to feel refreshed and better cope with stress” (Pressman, et al., 2009, p. 2).

Engaging in extracurricular activities with members of the host country also serves as a platform for conversation to occur. Practicing intercultural competence, the ability to work and communicate effectively with people from another culture, is vital in today’s society. Population

diversity and global connectedness are ever-increasing. The 2015 United States Census Bureau predicts that demographic shifts will make the US a “majority minority” country by 2043 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Moreover, technological advances have made it necessary to be able to communicate with people from across the world in professional contexts (Durden, Rosario T. de Guzman, Taylor, Guzman, & Potthoff, 2016). Employers worldwide value employees who are able to “work in teams, communicate, and negotiate different social and cultural environments” and favor candidates who can demonstrate that over others (Council, 2013).

Leisure pursuits offer physiological, psychological, and social benefits that can be useful for US students studying abroad. There is potential for leisure to help alleviate the culture shock a student might feel early on in their experience, to form strong intercultural relationships with members of the host country, and to develop a skill set that can be used in changing environments. For these reasons, engaging in extracurricular activities while studying abroad may be worthwhile for many study abroad students.

Definition of Terms

- Study Abroad: While there are many definitions of study abroad, for the purpose of this study, it means that individuals have participated in a program found through their university or outside agency for at least 12 weeks for academic credit.
- Structured Activities: The activities that are organized, planned and offered by the program with the intention that all students in their program may participate. These activities often have an itinerary and a program staff member(s) present for the duration.

- Non-structured Time: Refers to the time when students explore something of their own choosing, often through a source they discovered independently, but could also have spurred from a structured activity. They are participating without being supervised by their study abroad program.
- Recreation: While there are many definitions of recreation, for the purpose of this study, it means an activity, such as a game or hobby, that is pursued while abroad primarily for pleasure and away from obligations of the study abroad program.
- Cultural Awareness: Knowing about the history, values and beliefs of another ethnic or cultural group, as well as the understanding and recognition that differences exist between cultures, without assigned values to those differences.

Chapter 2

Research Methods

Study Population and Recruitment of Sample

Undergraduate students who participated in a semester-long study abroad program and who also participated in extracurricular activities outside of those provided by the study abroad program were recruited and interviewed. Semester-long programs were chosen as the minimum for this study because it is shown that longer programs of sixteen weeks or more yield greater effects on the individual's global-mindedness and cultural sensitivity (Kehl & Morris, 2007-2008). Study participants also needed to be the minority culture while participating in the activity to be involved with the study. Being isolated from peers that share the same cultural identity forces the individual to break down "societal barriers" and make contact with the host culture (Axner, 2018). Acceptable types of recreation activities for this study included, but were not limited to: volunteering, playing on a sports team, and joining a club.

Potential research participants were contacted via network channels accessible to the primary investigator. E-mails were sent to representatives from Penn State Global Education, Global Citizen Year, and Council on International Educational Exchange requesting approval for the study to be shared with alumni from each program. The e-mails also provided the primary investigator's contact information so potential subjects could express interest in participating. Although 19 people responded, only 11 participated in the interviews and of these, one was

eliminated from the study as it was discovered they were participating in a research assistantship rather than a study abroad program.

Amongst the ten interviews that aligned with the scope of the study, there was a diverse sample in study abroad location and purpose for enrolling in study abroad. Participants studied abroad to get in touch with family heritage, explore another part of the world, and satisfy requirements of their specific academic program. The interviews were completed with students that traveled to various foreign countries in South America and Europe. One participant went to the following countries: England, Spain, Ecuador and Germany. Two respondents studied abroad in Italy, and the remaining five went to Russia. Two students had already graduated from their universities, while nine were still completing their undergraduate degrees. Following data collection, the interviews were scanned for common themes and messages between respondents. The thesis supervisor helped revise codes and assign them to one of the three research questions.

Data Collection

One-hour-long in-depth interviews were conducted in a private setting. In-depth interviews probe the experience, behavior, feelings and/or attitudes of the participant, allowing the researcher to identify underlying concepts related to the research topic (Morgan, 2016). All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the primary investigator, and each study participant was assigned a pseudonym. Audio recordings were deleted after transcriptions were finished. Each interview followed a guide with roughly ten open-ended questions. The Interview Guide had a series of warm-up questions that got a sense of the context of the research subject's study

abroad. Then, the interview transitioned to the discussion of both structured and non-structured extracurricular activities.

First, it introduced the research participant to the primary investigator and purpose of the study. It also informed the participant of their right to confidentiality and to withdraw at any time. Participants were asked to share background information about their study abroad program, knowledge of the host country prior to departure, and how the experience influenced their studies. Then, participants were asked about how they occupied non-structured time and the activities they participated in abroad. The interview concluded with questions regarding the activity's affect on their abroad experience and influence on perceptions of the host culture. See Appendix A for a copy of the Interview Guide.

Thematic Analysis

After the data collection process, in-depth interviews were coded by determining emergent themes. The transcripts were reviewed holistically to see if anything came up regarding the role of structured and unstructured activities, their benefits and the variation of outcomes between the two. For example, the primary investigator read through each document multiple times to find emerging themes between participant responses. Themes and subthemes were shared with thesis advisors for cross-checking. The Thesis Supervisor then reviewed the codes and modified them based on conversations had during meetings about the thesis, and he assisted in linking the various themes to research questions. The Thesis Reader then checked the quotes against both the themes and subthemes from interviews.

Strategies to Minimize Bias

The primary investigator had experience and a recognition of benefits from non-structured activities while studying abroad. This allowed her to understand the structure and nuances to better probe in questioning. However, the primary investigator took steps to minimize bias. She was supervised by a team of two professors with experience in qualitative research methods, but are not directly involved with study abroad programming, which helped prevent personal experience overshadowing hard data. Efforts were made to design open-ended interview questions that were neutral and non-leading. During the course of interviewing, the primary investigator attempted to remain objective by repeating responses back to participants for clarification.

Chapter 3

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of structured and non-structured activities during a study abroad program, the benefits of non-structured extracurricular involvement, as well as the outcomes of participating in both. With regard to the role of structured and non-structured activities, thematic analysis revealed a number of subthemes: Structured activities provided guided and educational experiences, in addition to serving as an orientation to non-structured activities, while non-structured activities served as a source of enjoyment for the participant, as well as an opportunity to continue a personal hobby, to go outside of their comfort zone and to advance understanding of the host culture.

Research subjects were able to identify numerous benefits of participating in non-structured activities while studying abroad. Themes and subthemes that came up in interviews were feeling a sense of autonomy, building lasting relationships with members of the host culture, having mutual exchange and understanding, appreciating diversity, acquiring language and experiencing the culture from a different perspective. With regard to the outcomes of structured and non-structured activity participation, the following themes were discussed: Student expectations were more likely to be met in structured activities, however, program limitations remained. From non-structured activities, there were more personal connections with locals, immersion, greater responsibility for the student and opportunities for professional development.

Research Question 1: The Perceived Role of Structured and Non-Structured Extracurricular Activities

Structured Activities

Interviews were reviewed for examples of structured extracurricular activities and what participants said about them, as well as non-structured extracurricular activities in order to discern their roles. Structured activities refers to those that are organized, planned and offered by the study abroad program with the intention that all students enrolled in the program may participate. Such activities often have an itinerary and a program staff member(s) present for the duration. Non-structured refers to activities pursued by the student during free time, away from obligation of the program. These activities are often discovered independently, but could also have spurred from participating in a structured activity.

Guided Experience

Study participants responded that structured extracurricular activities provided by the program were more guided than the non-structured. The experience of participating in a structured activity was described by Allison as, “They had someone leading you where you were going and bringing you back, someone who spoke English at all times... the things they offered were usually the same things, like cooking classes or dance lessons or sporting events.” One of Peter’s comments mirrors this response. He noted, “They give you your itinerary and you do what they plan for you... it was more planned out for us... based on what they believed that we should be exposed to.” Structured activities provide an opportunity for the study abroad program

to maintain a sense of control over students' free time in-country, as well as providing a guided educational experience.

Education

Various students commented on the educational aspect of structured activities offered during study abroad. Nate said, "We had tour guides for all of our travels and student helpers, so we got a lot of the local history when we went places." Similarly, Lexi explained that "you were always learning something. You were always... advancing your knowledge of (the location) or of (the language)." Another participant, Caroline, said that activities offered by the program helped her understand the history of her study abroad location better.

Orientation to Non-Structured Activities

Interestingly, it is apparent that the role of structured activities is also providing students with an opportunity to find non-structured activities of their own choosing. Many respondents talked about an orientation event that helped them find local people and interests to pursue. For example, Noah "got involved first at the Involvement Fair" that was hosted by his university. He was able to try out for a futsal team from there, which allowed him to meet locals and play more soccer. Similarly, one program hosted what Lexi described as "mingling nights" where they would talk, play games and get to know people. She said, "From there, you could kind of choose who you cliqued with really well and they were your friend for the rest of the semester."

Not only do the programs provide such opportunities for connections, but several study participants contacted a specific person to help them find their desired activity. For example,

Lily said there “wasn’t really anything offered through (the program) so I had to go out and find my own, but Ira helped me out a lot and set it up for me.” Allison also reached out to someone to help guide her. She explained, “I told Katya, one of the assistants at (the program) who organizes activities, if she could help me figure out how to join a team.” From these experiences, it appears important that structured programs and staff members are available to help the students find activities to do in their free time.

Non-Structured Activities

With regard to non-structured activities, four main subthemes emerged: the inherent enjoyment of the activity in question, the desire to continue that whether it was a sport or hobby, testing personal boundaries by venturing outside of their comfort zone and advancing cultural understanding. These themes and example quotes are now discussed.

Enjoyment

One of the primary roles of non-structured activities during a study abroad program is providing the student with enjoyment. A theme that came up across multiple interviews was that students appreciated being able to pursue their own interests in a new culture through extracurricular activities in leisure time. Eddie described his experience as, “Because I was able to seek out things that I wanted to do, I was able to meet people with similar interests... or do things that I would enjoy. Even though I did enjoy the activities offered by the program, I definitely would not have looked back as nostalgically if that was the only thing I’d done while I was there.” Caroline’s response aligned with his remark. “With the things I sought out on my

own... I was enjoying every single moment of it... it was probably what made my study abroad experience so much more amazing.”

Continuation of Recreation Activity

A few of the students competed in their respective leisure activity before studying abroad. For this reason, they were eager to continue doing so throughout the experience. Some were concerned about losing skill while abroad. Allison said, “I’m on the track team at (home university) and it is Division 1 and I really needed to be training while I was studying abroad.” Similarly, Lily didn’t want to lose the ballroom dance ability that she had learned previously because she was a part of the ballroom club at home. In other cases, the idea of competing abroad was a major motivation for students going abroad. Eddie, specifically, said, “I literally knew what gym I wanted to go to before I had applied for the program... the novelty of (boxing) in another country was another gigantic motivating factor.”

Going Outside of One’s Comfort Zone

Some students perceived the role of study abroad in general to experience something new, and identified non-structured leisure activities in particular, as a way to go outside of their comfort zone even more. Peter described his experience by saying, “I thought the whole part of study abroad was that I was supposed to... step outside my comfort zone and do things that I otherwise wouldn’t be doing in the United States. So (teaching English) was something I thought I could take advantage of.” Participating in activities beyond the classroom, and by his own accord, provided an opportunity for him to challenge himself even further.

The challenge also contributes to personal growth. Allison describes her experience by saying, “When I went on my own and did things... it was a lot more difficult. I felt like I was really experiencing the culture on my own and forcing myself to speak Russian.” A comment from Richard summarizes how going outside of one’s comfort zone is a benefit of non-structured extracurricular activities. He said, “(Participating in non-structured extracurricular activities) will completely build the character of the individual... by doing stuff that is outside of their comfort zone in a completely foreign country.” It forces them to be more self-reliant and engaged with the local community.

Advance Cultural Understanding

Finally, students who participated in non-structured extracurricular activities while abroad found that it furthered their understanding of the host culture. Eddie said, “If I had only participated in the experiences offered by the study abroad program, I think that I would not understand (type of) culture to the degree that I do now... because all of the activities were with your American peers.” Having regular direct contact with locals of the study abroad location provided insight. Allison described learning about cultural differences by running track abroad. She said, “it opened my eyes to how different people act in certain ways and how different coaches teach different things.” Lexi’s response aligns with both Eddie’s and Allison’s comments: “I think participating in extracurriculars was really important because it made me understand the culture more. It made me understand the lifestyle and how all of the different parts of the city that kind of come together as one were really important.”

Research Question 2: The Benefits of Participating in Extracurricular Activities during Leisure Time Abroad

Due to the limited evidence on how extracurricular activities impact a study abroad experience, it was important to inquire about how participants believed they were affected as a result of their participation. Research subjects responded similarly. The majority expressed appreciation for how participating in a leisure activity during non-structured time enhanced the experience overall for various reasons. The benefits they realized include: feeling a sense of autonomy, building lasting relationships, having mutual exchange and understanding between cultures, appreciating diversity, acquiring language and experiencing the culture from a different perspective.

Autonomy

Many students interviewed, including Noah, went into their study abroad program wanting control over their experience. He said, "I didn't want to just do the school-given excursions and be with the same people all the time... I like the idea of freedom and doing whatever I wanted when I travel to different countries. And I didn't like the idea of an itinerary telling me, 'We're gonna do this, we're gonna do that.'" Peter's response aligned with Noah's comment. Peter said that choosing to teach Italian students English during his free time helped him develop a sense of autonomy. Participating in extracurricular activities during non-structured time seemed to give the student choice and independence from the program itself.

Building Lasting Relationships

Extracurricular activities pursued by the student also provided a unique avenue to connect with local people. The majority of research subjects responded saying that their recreation activity was the primary source of their relationships with members of the host community. For example, Alexander said, “It (basketball) was good for making some legitimate St. Petersburg friends.” Nate explained the reason behind why the activity helped build relationships by describing his experience. “The time I spent with extracurriculars... helped me get to know some people better. I made a lot of friends from the informal basketball... it just helped me to connect more with them because we found something of a common interest, and then that built friendships that we could explore each other’s culture more.”

Noah had a similar experience and emphasized the value of such relationship building. He said, “It’s imperative that you reach out and make these connections and friendships yourself because I know everybody I met, the day I left, they were like, ‘If you ever come to X, Y or Z country, you will have a place to stay and be welcomed.’” Caroline also mentioned that the friendships she made while abroad transcend the experience itself. She continues to be in touch with them through social media. Involvement in extracurricular activities during non-structured time introduces students to people with common interests, and forms a bond between them that lasts beyond the semester spent in-country.

Mutual Exchange and Understanding

Not only does direct contact through non-structured extracurricular activities provide the student with cultural knowledge, but it also can allow members of the host country to learn about

the student's home culture. The exchange can be as simple as learning each other's language. For example, Allison tutored a seven-year-old girl in English and said it was "a really cool experience" but "definitely learned some Russian while she was speaking English because she didn't speak English at all."

It could also provide a platform to deeper discuss less obvious differences between the cultures than just language. In an interview with Noah, he described his experience listening to his English futsal teammates talking about tuition. "We were on a train for one of our away matches... and they were all complaining that their tuition went up from 3,000 a year to 10,000 a year... and then they all just sort of turned to me and looked at me and said, 'Wait, you're from America, right? How expensive is your school?' And I was like, '...there's some students that pay 45 grand a year.' And they all looked at me like... (eyebrows raised)." He said this instance gave him a different understanding of what was normal and vice versa.

Appreciating Diversity

A common theme that came up when interview participants were asked about their structured programs was frustration with the homogeneity of the groups. They were most commonly, if not always, travelling in a group entirely comprised of other American students. For this reason, they often defaulted to speaking English. Participating in non-structured activities during their free time often involved interacting with people from other places, which helped students appreciate diversity more. Noah emphasized how much he valued his study abroad experience because playing futsal introduced him to people from different backgrounds. "I was the only American, so that's what I really liked about it. About half of them were British,

and then half of them were students at the university but they were not British... it was a great mixture.”

Language Acquisition

Continuing a hobby in a foreign country during free-time also allows the participant to acquire a niche vocabulary in the host culture’s language. Both Allison and Alexander felt they further developed their language skills in this way during their study abroad program. Allison said, “It helped me with my language skills. I was only speaking Russian and I learned a lot of terms, like long jump, in Russian that I would never have known otherwise.” Similarly, Alexander said that he could have been officially on the roster of his basketball team had he studied abroad for a full year, instead of one semester. “I would have done it. It would have been really neat for my Russian... It was a good niche vocabulary.” There is an opportunity for students to learn parts of the language not taught in class by participating in extracurricular activities during their free time.

Experiencing the Culture from a Different Perspective

Taking advantage of free-time by getting involved with recreation activities provides the student with a different perspective of the culture. An emergent theme from the interviews was that their leisure time activities influenced the students’ views on the host culture. For example, Richard realized his prejudices against Italians and vice versa by volunteering to teach English to high school students. “It kind of influenced how I saw the Italians and my perspective of how they saw Americans, because they have... so many prejudices toward us that I didn’t know until

I went there.” Moreover, Peter also experienced Italy in a different way despite having been there “like a million times.” He said, “I got to see a different perspective of Italy, culturally and educationally.”

Caroline also felt that her non-structured activity participation gave her a window into the host culture. “With choir, I was able to go and visit multiple peoples’ apartments and flats... and really got to experience some things from a different perspective.” Being involved with extracurriculars while abroad provides the student with a completely unique experience because it derives entirely from the student’s interest. For that reason, each experience will give them a different way to look at and understand the host culture. It allows them to simultaneously be a silent observer and active participant in the host culture.

Research Question 3: Comparing Outcomes of Structured and Non-Structured Activity Participation

After each interview participant discussed their study abroad experience as it related to extracurricular involvement, they were asked to reflect upon the outcomes they identified from both structured and non-structured activities. Responses indicated that expectations were more likely to be met with structured activities, but they were also limited in what they could provide. Non-structured activities, however, produced more personal connections with locals, levels of immersion, greater responsibility for the student and, on one occasion, contributed to professional development.

Structured

Expectations More Likely to be Met

Alexander described his experience participating in activities provided by the program by saying they were more likely to ensure his prior expectations would be realized. He said, “The good thing about (the university programs) is that they’re controlled. You know what you’re going to get out of it benefits-wise. You know when it’s going to happen and where. You know that there’s not rules... but... organized times and events, topics, and things that you’ll learn.” The formalities involved with structured programs, such as having a tour guide and itinerary, create certainty in the product for participants.

Program Limitations

When there is a specific outline of what will happen during a given structured activity, there are also limitations. Students frequently mentioned feeling like they were in a “bubble” while participating in structured programs and restrained in various other ways. The structured programs were described by Caroline as being “geared towards Americans” with a rigid schedule that limited their ability to explore elsewhere. Alexander also expressed frustrations with how the structured programs “devolved into English a lot” as a result of having all of the American students together. It wasn’t until they found recreation activities in their leisure time, as Lily said, that got them “out of the bubble that (the program) kind of creates for yourself.”

Non-Structured

Personal Connections with Local People

Based on the interview results, it seems that being able to participate in personal interests during free-time while abroad led to deeper personal connections with locals. It provided the student with an opportunity to regularly interact with them during while pursuing a common interest. For example, Nate said it was during basketball practices that he built friendships with local people. “The informal was when we had more time and got to know each other better. We would also schedule events like inviting each other over for dinner, and I traveled with a few of the guys to other countries too.” The non-structured free time was a platform for students to jump off of and make connections independently.

A few research subjects augmented the value of non-structured activities as a vehicle for personal relationships by mentioning anecdotes from fellow students that didn’t participate. Lexi said, “I think just seeing people who didn’t get involved with the extracurricular activities... didn’t have as much of a personal connection.” Noah also knew people that remained in the “bubble” of the program. One of his friends studying abroad was from the United States and lived with five other people from the same place. At the end of the semester, one of his “main talking points was, ‘I wish I met more local people.’ He barely met anybody from (the country) that he could talk to and be like, ‘Hey, how’s it going?’” This demonstrates how making personal connections with people from the host country while studying abroad is a desired part of the experience, and can be achieved by participating in non-structured extracurricular activities.

Immersion

The most significant, or most commonly talked about, outcome of participating in non-structured activities during free time appears to be the additional opportunity for immersion. Including the level of involvement with local people, it encompasses the student's language acquisition and comfort being around members of the host country as the sole foreigner. Much of the immersion derived from being isolated from the student's home culture. For example, Eddie said, "There was extreme immersion because only one person spoke English." It also led to increased involvement with the community. Noah said he went to the university pub at a branch campus of his host university solely because his team members brought him there. He explained, "I never would have been interested in going up there, meeting other students, if I hadn't been a part of this team." He also mentioned feeling more comfortable talking about "diversity and skin tone, or even ethnic or country backgrounds" by being around diverse people on his futsal team so frequently.

Participating in leisure activities during free-time also contributed to greater comfort being around local people as the only expatriate. Lexi, specifically, remembered feeling this way as a result of her flamenco dance classes. "For me, to get to know the dances and actually know what I'm doing, and not seem like a total outsider, was nice because I didn't feel like an outsider or feel like I didn't fit in there. I felt like I was a part of the community." Caroline also identified with a group in her host country a result of her extracurricular involvement. "Just getting to go to peoples' homes and be served... more traditional Russian food... just getting to feel like you're a part of a group that wasn't mostly Americans... so I think that's the thing that affected my study abroad the most." Participating in leisure activities with locals during non-structured time provides an opportunity to become a part of the culture in a unique way.

Greater Responsibility for Student

Being able to participate in a leisure activity during study abroad that is not already provided by the program relies greatly on the individual's initiative. It is completely upon the student to ask about, locate and show up consistently to the activity. For example, Alexander talked about his experience finding basketball. "It was through a contact at the program, he set me up with it, but other than that, I had to write a bunch of emails and figure out who the team captain was and where in the world this gym was on my own... the point is, it took way more effort on my part, but it was also really rewarding once I figured it out and they let me play with them." Peter also said that his voluntary teaching forced him to be more responsible while studying abroad, and recognized that it was "good on many facets."

Professional Development

A lesser common theme between interviews was the opportunity for professional development due to the student's involvement in extracurriculars during their free time. However, it is important to mention how the relationship that Caroline developed with her choir director. She mentioned in her interview that at the end of the semester, "She actually offered to write me a letter of recommendation if I ever needed it. So, basically, my understanding is, if I was to go to graduate school... that's what she was offering me." Her choir involvement led to developing a meaningful, intercultural relationship with the director that could help her with future professional pursuits. While she discovered social leverage during her non-structured extracurricular involvement, students may also develop professional skills. For example, Peter felt he "was able to harness one of (his) abilities and help other people through doing

something.” Volunteering to teach English while studying abroad gave him the time and space to practice a skill that he could use in his career later on.

Chapter 4

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

In general, narratives and themes from this study suggest that structured and non-structured activities play different roles in a study abroad program and are sometimes mutually reinforcing. For example, structured activities offered by the program can serve as an orientation that leads students to non-structured opportunities. In regard to having structured opportunities, they can facilitate activities and make connections. It provides a menu of options for things that students can do during their study abroad experience. The purpose of non-structured activities, however, seems to be more in terms of enjoyment and providing linkages to hobbies and recreation activities pursued at home. Benefits include: feeling a sense of autonomy, building lasting relationships, having mutual exchange and understanding, appreciating diversity, developing language skills and experiencing the culture from a different perspective. Finally, when comparing outcomes across the two types of activities, structured activities were associated with student expectations and program limitations, whereas non-structured activities were associated with personal connections with local people, immersion, responsibility and professional development.

Study Abroad and Leisure

There is vast research exploring the benefits of study abroad, and many studies find that participating in study abroad yields greater self-worth, language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity, among other increases in personal and professional development. Most studies also suggest studying abroad for longer periods of time as a strategy for maximizing those benefits because direct contact with the host culture is sustained. With that being said, time is a precious commodity for citizens of the United States. It is shown that Americans dedicate most of their time to work. This may explain why the most common duration for study abroad is eight weeks or less. It is unlikely that every higher education student in the United States will be able to devote more than one semester to a study abroad experience.

For this reason, leisure pursuits during the study abroad experience are critical. The independence and immersion involved with participating in recreation when the majority of participants are members of the host culture allows for that direct contact regardless of program duration. It has the potential to be habitual for the individual. The student has a means for engaging with the host culture, away from temptation of speaking English with fellow study abroad students or devolving to program staff members, who are often fluent in the host language. This aligns with the results from the Langley & Breese study done in 2005 on sophomores studying abroad in Ireland, as well as the responses from research subjects in this study. Their participation in extracurricular activities led to interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits. Students appreciated their sense of autonomy, were able to build lasting relationships and experience mutual exchange and understanding, to name a few.

Many research subjects expressed how their participation in extracurriculars, aside from those offered by the program, is the reason for their positive study abroad experience. It was a

source of enjoyment because they could pursue a personal interest and continue a hobby. Their non-structured leisure activity was unique to their experience, and created personal connections with members of the host culture that went beyond the semester abroad itself. There is something to be said about the level of immersion research subjects underwent solely because of their independent leisure participation and how that can deepen benefits of studying abroad, regardless of program duration. Although study abroad is a finite and commonly short-term experience, becoming involved with non-structured extracurricular activities can help it last a lifetime.

Emerging Adulthood

What could impact an individual's decision to pursue a leisure experience while abroad, aside from those provided by the program, could be the phase of life that they are in as college students. It is a period of time between adolescence and adulthood involving an ability be dependent, but a desire to not need to be. It's a "self-focused freedom" (Arnett, 2019). This transition from external to self-reliance can lead to exploration of self and other, as well as entail feelings of loneliness. Since this length of time is recognized as a life stage that developed within the last half-century, researchers are now exploring how the transition to adulthood can be optimized (Arnett, 2019). Finding a non-structured leisure activity during study abroad would be an ideal situation. It gives students an opportunity to practice independence, build relationships that combat isolation and develop a sense of autonomy. Many research subjects responded in a way that affirmed this hypothesis.

One of the main outcomes of non-structured leisure participation from the perspective of the students was that responsibility was greater on their part. Although the research subjects were frustrated with how long it took to find the team or activity in some cases, they still felt like they grew from the experience. They had to communicate with various outlets to find a leisure activity of their interest. Some responses included a sentence about the program staff member that helped connect them to a contact at their activity, but it was ultimately upon the student to follow up and make things happen for themselves. Richard even said that it can lead to greater pride in oneself as a result.

Along with pride, studying abroad can bring on a range of emotions. Loneliness is one of the most common due to the culture shock that often happens towards the beginning of a study abroad program. Some describe it as an inevitable part of the experience (Kelley, 2015). Finding an outlet through which one can pursue their own interests helps the individual build relationships. Both Eddie and Nate described how meeting people with similar hobbies led to the formation of stronger relationships. It makes it easier to bond with people, despite language barriers, when there is mutual interest in an activity.

Developing a sense of autonomy was one of the most discussed benefits from participating in a non-structured extracurricular activity and a staple characteristic of Emerging Adulthood. Research subjects began their study abroad experience seeking independence and freedom, and found it in their leisure pursuits. Many resented the rigid schedule that program activities followed. They felt a greater control over their study abroad experience by being able to decide what they became involved with while there, whether it was playing a sport, volunteering or organizing their own travel plans. Based on the literature and interviews

completed, Emerging Adulthood could be an explanation for why students choose to pursue their own extracurricular activity while studying abroad.

Towards a Global Community

The recent trend in globalization is creating communities across national borders. Although its definition intends unity and social civility, the idea of ‘community’ can create tension in real-life situations. Oxford University Press and Community Development Journal collaborated on a study examining how a “recent resurgence of interest in the concept of community” relates to “the process of economic, political and social globalization” (Craig, Mayo, & Taylor, 2000). It highlights the possibility that globalization, as a concentration of economic and political power, contributed to social movements against it. For example, East Timor gaining independence from Indonesia in 1999. With this in mind, the article emphasizes the importance of considering new possibilities for bringing people together across the world (Craig, Mayo, & Taylor, 2000).

Various studies have demonstrated possible strategies that could help communities become more integrated and culturally competent, each aligning with the beginning stages of Bennett’s Development Model. For example, the National Association of School Psychologists suggests to “continue exploring your own culture, beliefs, and values; engage in dialogue with colleagues and continue to increase cultural literacy; assume there is heterogeneity within an ethnic group, but that the foundation of cultural values is likely to be homogeneous”, among others (Miranda, 2014). Research done by Early Childhood Educators at University of Nebraska identify three necessary components: active listening, empathy, and engagement (Durdin,

Rosario T. de Guzman, Taylor, Guzman, & Pothoff, 2016). They define engagement as a “mutually beneficial and reciprocal learning experience.” However, the only example of an engagement opportunity provided is conversation with someone from another culture. While this is a reasonable approach to becoming culturally competent, perhaps a more effective form can take place.

Students participating in a study abroad program, particularly those that engage with the host culture through non-structured leisure pursuits, have a unique experience that contributes to stages of Bennett’s Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Students interested in studying abroad are already halfway through the Model, considering their recognition of other cultures and motivation to learn more about them. Their study abroad experience might heighten self-awareness of their own culture. For example, Noah said that “their perspective seems to be a lot different and it seems to be ahead of ours in terms of social issues” when asked about his perspective toward the host culture after participating in leisure pursuits.

It is important to consider how students going abroad have an inherent openness to new experiences and new cultures. This could mean that they are already be ahead of the average person in terms of intercultural sensitivity. A research study done by Dr. Kristin Thomas identified students’ motivations for studying abroad as “multi-dimensional” but related to their perceived purpose for education abroad, which was “to be in touch or connected with the rest of the world in a way that cannot be accomplished at their home institution” (Thomas, 2017, p. 70). This suggests that individuals studying abroad their experience at a level of Acceptance because they recognize their culture as a part of a greater whole. Participating in non-structured extracurricular activities can contribute to graduating through the remaining stages: Adaptation and Integration.

For example, Allison shared an anecdote about cultural difference that she experienced with her track coach. She considered some of the comments he made as “harsh” and “sexist” but understood that he was a product of the host culture’s values. She said, “I know he cared about me, but he was just a very traditional old Russian guy... he got me into really good shape... but... their culture is a bit more conservative and not as accepting as other places... so there were some things that were just a little different than I’ve experienced.” Without sacrificing herself or insulting another, Allison recognized cultural differences and relayed them to a third party without describing one as inherently better.

She also mentioned an instance when she was removing an outer layer of clothing outside of the locker room, alongside teammates, and her coach singled her out solely because of her gender and national origin. Although she was frustrated by his comments at the time, it opened her eyes and helped her understand the culture more. Allison was transitioning through the latter stages of Bennett’s Developmental Model during her track experience, whether she realized it or not. The probability for this transformation to occur through non-structured activities during study abroad, due to its level of direct contact with the host culture and unique opportunity for immersion, makes it worth considering as a strategy for innovatively developing communities across cultures going forward.

International Workplace

Although the majority of literature regarding study abroad impacts refers to immediate gratification, there is research showing a relation between an individual’s study abroad experience and their professional career. A study done by Kimberly Franklin for The

Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad (2010) examines the concept further. By interviewing 189 college alumni who studied abroad ten years after they graduated, Franklin was able to identify connections between their undergraduate experience abroad and current professional situation. Their responses suggested study abroad contributed significantly to their “gravitation toward international or multicultural jobs, choice of profession, economic returns, and the value of alumni by employers” (Franklin, 2010, p. 176).

The “Areas of Achievement” reported were most significant. Following Mary Lee & Evans’ notion that “students’ personal learning can be broadly categorized into four categories of development”, responses were evaluated within language skills, intercultural competence, disciplinary knowledge, and social growth (Franklin, 2010). Seventy-four percent continued to use the non-English language they learned while abroad in a professional capacity (Franklin, 2010). Several respondents also agreed that the “cultural awareness and knowledge”, in addition to the “self-awareness gains from their study abroad experience” can be applied professionally (p. 184). Peter’s experience harnessing his language skills as a volunteer teacher’s aide during study abroad aligns with this idea.

Perhaps most notably for this study, there is also evidence showing that an individual’s career path can be impacted by building cross-cultural relationships during a study abroad program. A study done by Emily Mohajeri Norris and Joan Gillespie for the Institute for The International Education of Students (2009) explored how study abroad shaped the careers of program alumni that work internationally. They found that “more than double the number of international-work alumni established relationships while studying abroad that became professional contacts” (Norris & Gillespie, 2009). While none of the research subjects in this study mentioned fellow students becoming professional contacts, Lily did receive an offer for a

letter of recommendation from her choir director. Considering the interview responses and conclusions from the aforementioned studies indicates that study abroad as a whole, and especially participating in non-structured extracurricular activities throughout, can be a source for progressing the students' professional career.

Limitations of Study

Data collected for this research study provided insight into the role of structured and non-structured activities during a study abroad program, the benefits of non-structured activities and how outcomes between the two types compared. The information could be used by study abroad programs and institutes of higher education to influence how they market education abroad programs, as well as what they encourage students to get involved with while abroad. While the study detailed personal experiences of students that went abroad and participated in non-structured leisure, there were a few limitations.

A very small sample was interviewed about their experience. Working through e-mail chains that belonged to other organizations was lengthy, and yielded only a handful of potential research subjects. The window of potential participants became even smaller then after screening processes. The primary investigator would not have been able to complete much more than eleven interviews either due to time restrictions. The small sample size may have caused less conclusive results in the study, and further research on this topic should aim to include more participants if able.

Second, themes and subthemes were difficult to place between research questions. While the language used in interviews was intentionally broad to minimize bias, it also contributed to

less clear responses in terms of what research question it related to. It was tough to discern between a role, benefit and outcome in participants' responses. For example, 'outcome' could be positive or negative, whereas 'benefit' is inherently good and 'role' is overly broad. Studies exploring the relation between these three areas should spend more time dissecting vernacular to ensure more clear connections between responses and research questions.

Recommendations for the Future

In addition to taking measures to minimize the limitations that were identified for this study, interview responses suggest various recommendations for students interested in studying abroad, study abroad programs and institutes of higher education and researchers going forward.

For Students

Recommendations for students as a result of this thesis are simple. The research subjects interviewed all realized a degree of positive benefit from studying abroad while in college, and especially from participating in a non-structured extracurricular activity while there. Information gathered suggests that students should make studying abroad before graduating a priority. Students should also make an effort to go outside of their comfort zone while in-country by continuing a hobby, or finding a new one, and participating regularly. This will prompt direct contact with the host country and lead to greater cultural knowledge and understanding, immersion and relationship building. Still, take advantage of both the structured and non-structured extracurricular opportunities that are available. The roles and outcomes may differ,

but the two types of leisure reinforce each other and create a more impactful experience for the student.

For Study Abroad Programs and Institutes of Higher Education

Based on interview responses, study abroad programs and institutes of higher education still play a role in a student's non-structured leisure while abroad, even if they don't supervise the activity directly. Various research subjects referred to a specific person that worked for their study abroad program and helped them find their extracurricular activity. For this reason, in-country staff of study abroad programs should continue being available to and supportive of students interested in finding their own free-time activity. They should also consider asking students what their interests are directly, and asking how they can help them pursue those, more often to make students aware of the possibility. It is also important to continue providing the structured activities, as they appear to reinforce the non-structured and vice versa.

Institutes of higher education, such as the student's home university or college, should consider the information presented in this thesis when marketing their education abroad opportunities. Students may deem studying abroad more appealing for the benefits that participating in a non-structured leisure activity provides. They may also be more interested in studying abroad given the knowledge that they can still have a sense of autonomy during the experience, despite being involved in a structured program. Making that information evident could increase the amount of university students in the United States going abroad as an undergraduate, and yield greater involvement with the host culture while abroad.

For Researchers

To increase conclusiveness of responses, studies exploring the role of leisure during study abroad should look into recruiting a larger sample size, should resources allow it. More specifically-defined research questions would also help avoid confusion between terms mentioned in the interviews. Overall, how leisure pursuits independent from the study abroad program impact the student's experience as a whole should be explored further. There is minimal research already done on non-structured extracurricular activities and its relation to study abroad specifically. Most of the literature in this area examine general benefits of study abroad.

With that in mind, there is great opportunity to look closer at how orientation programs provided by the study abroad program lead to making connections with locals. It is worth discovering strategies for how those linkages could be intentionally programmed without taking away the student's autonomy in the process so all study abroad students can find their niche in the host community and still work towards reaching adulthood. Researchers can also compare the outcomes between study abroad programs with much flexibility against those that are more rigid, to see which delivers benefits, such as autonomy and intercultural understanding, more powerfully. As we become a more global society and student engagement becomes a more integral part of the university experience, research which integrates the role of recreation, leisure and the tourism industry will be increasingly important.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Part 1: Introduction

Hi. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me! My name is Grace Mannix. I am a senior in Recreation, Park and Tourism Management here at Penn State writing an undergraduate thesis for Schreyer Honors College. I'm going to be asking you questions about your participation in extracurricular recreation and/or leisure activities during your study abroad experience.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may back out at any time during the process. If you choose to do so, none of your responses will be saved. Your name will not be printed in any drafts or final documents either to protect your privacy. Are you ready to begin the interview?

Part 2: Student/Program Information

- What semester standing are you?
- Thinking back to before you went, why did you choose to study abroad?
- Please tell me about the study abroad program you went on (get a general idea).
 - Probing questions: When did you go? Who sponsored it? How long were you there? What was your housing situation? Why did you choose that program/country? Where did you take classes? Which classes did you take?
- What did the program offer for you to get involved with outside of class (day/weekend trips, conversation partner program, etc.)? This is where I would distinguish between

structured, program-offered extracurricular activities, before asking about the activities they pursued independently.

Part 3: Leisure Time

- Did you have non-structured time where you were able to do things on your own?
- What did you do with this time?
- Tell me more about that activity.
 - Probing questions: What was it? Why did you want to pursue this activity? How did you find it? Who did you do it with? How often would you participate, and for how long? Where was it located? When did you do it?

Part 4: Application Questions

- From your perspective, how did participating in extracurricular activities affect your study abroad experience as a whole? (ties back to Research Question #1 and #2)
 - Probing questions: How did it affect your perspective on the host culture? How did it enhance, or impede, your understanding of the culture and language? How did it influence your perspective on other cultures? What did that activity mean to you during your time there?
- From your perspective, was there a difference between participating in activities offered by the program and activities you sought out? (ties back to Research Question #3)
 - Probing questions: Did you benefit more from one more than the other, if at all? How do the benefits compare? What frustrated you about one or the other? What motivated you to participate in either?
- Tell me about an experience you had while studying abroad that happened only because you participated in the given recreation and/or leisure activity.

Part 5: Conclusion

Those are all of the questions I have for you. Thank you very much for your time and participation in my research study. Before we go, is there anything you want to add that perhaps, I didn't ask, or do you have any questions for me?

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Academic Vita of Grace Mannix

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Work Experience

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Title: Ice Resurfacers

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- Fred Coombs Scholarship, 2018
- Francis Hoffman Award for Excellence in Writing, Spring 2017
- John Fields Memorial Scholarship, Spring 2017
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Professional Memberships: Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society

Community Service Involvement: American Red Cross, Centre County Paws, Days for Girls, Emergency Aid Foundation of Pennsylvania, Maison de la Gare, Penn State Dance Marathon, Schreyer for Women, Shaver's Creek Environmental Center

International Education (including service-learning abroad):

- Council on International Educational Exchange Russian Area Studies Program; St. Petersburg, Russia; Fall 2017
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