

Holistic Student Development during Study Abroad: The Impact of the Semester at Sea Program

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Abstract

Study abroad programs are often supported and encouraged by educators and professionals, because it is assumed that the participants will become open-minded, more culturally competent, and increase their global awareness. However, few studies examine how study abroad impacts students holistically. The present qualitative study was guided by the “Holistic Development Theory”, and examined the impact of the “*Semester at Sea*” (SAS) program on multiple aspects of student development. Eighty undergraduate students who participated in the program were asked to report on the personal, academic, social, and professional impacts of the SAS voyage. Although students reported impacts in all areas of development, students identified the most advantages in the personal and social arenas. This study highlights the importance of considering the whole student in study abroad program development and recommendations for how educators can do so are also provided.

Key words: Holistic Development Theory, Study Abroad, Semester at Sea, Student Development, Global Education

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Study abroad in higher education is recognized as an experiential learning platform for fostering intercultural exchange (Sherman et al., 2020). Study abroad programs are also deemed as learning platforms that integrate knowledge acquired in the classroom with real-life experiences. Many scholars have specified the need and significance of engaging students in the area of international education, because after the study abroad program is completed, students are more globally informed, responsible, mature, and competent (Aktas et al., 2017; Bates, 2012; Lorenzini, 2013; Perry et al., 2012). As a result, many universities throughout the U.S. and Europe include “global citizenship” as a specific learning outcome or a required student competency for undergraduate education (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). Proponents of global citizenship education believe that study abroad is an opportunity not only for the internationalization of the university campus but also for the transformation in the students’ basic intellectual, academic, and personal development (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002), growth in intercultural competencies (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Williams, 2005), and the acquisition of understanding one’s role in an interconnected global society (Paige et al., 2009; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013).

Participating in study abroad programs falls in the category of high impact practices. Kuh (2008) proposes that high impact practices provide opportunities for extensive interaction between faculty and students, which requires dedication and a substantial time commitment from both instructors and learners. It requires students to communicate with classmates and instructors regularly about meaningful topics which exposes students to diverse ideas and people from different backgrounds.

In these programs, the professors provide students with regular assessments of their work; it enables students to apply their knowledge beyond the classroom walls, and possesses the potential to change the course of a student's life. Researchers (Kuh, 2009) have proposed that the integration of high impact practices during study abroad programs (i.e., engaging with people different from themselves, learning a foreign language, cultural immersion, and participating in service-learning projects), encourages students to apply the information to real life situations. Consequently, high impact practices within the context of study abroad programs can have a positive impact on students' personal, socio-cultural, academic, and professional development.

According to the Open Doors Report (2019), a total of 341,751 U.S. students studied abroad in 2018-19, representing a 2.7 percent increase from the previous academic year. The majority of students participated in short-term study abroad programs (4 weeks or less), rather than semester-long programs. Considering the increased student participation in study abroad and proposed beneficial outcomes, this paper will use the holistic development theory to explore how a semester-long study abroad program impacts students' development across a number of developmental domains. Most of the scholarship that has been published so far on the impact of study abroad has been based on short-term study abroad programs that are unique to a specific university. Moreover, a large majority of studies that have been published, have not focused on the impact of study abroad on the "whole student", rather they focus more narrowly on the implications of study abroad on a specific developmental outcome. However, this study will add to the scholarship of study abroad programs by assessing the impact of the Semester at Sea (SAS) program, a long-term semester-long program, on the students' personal, social, academic, and professional development. This study is unique from previous published works, because it is a qualitative, semester-long program, conducted on a cruise ship that has been converted to a floating university. Furthermore, a qualitative study on the holistic impact of the "*Semester at Sea*" (SAS) program on students' personal, social, academic and professional/career development has to our knowledge, not been conducted so far. Examining the implications of study abroad on multiple developmental domains will provide greater insight into the areas that students are experiencing gains in, and perhaps highlight areas that need more attention from faculty and program leaders.

Literature Review

The benefits and impact of study abroad is a topic that has received much research attention in the last few decades as the number of courses offering international content, student exchange opportunities, and short-term study abroad programs have increased. The scholarship has uncovered that there are both immediate and long-term benefits of study abroad programs. More specifically, a study abroad experience is likely to have a positive impact on an individual's personal growth, social skills, and career development (Anderson et al., 2006; Clarke et al., 2009; Di Pietro, 2020; Gonyea, 2008; Salisbury et al., 2011).

Researchers at the University of Minnesota conducted a study that summarized the long-term effects of study abroad (Paige et al., 2009). This study investigated the impact of study abroad on five parameters after the students had graduated with their baccalaureate degree. These dimensions were civic engagement, general knowledge, philanthropy, involvement in the community and ability to solve community-based issues, and ability to create social change. The researchers concluded that study abroad was one of the most significant and influential experiences of the respondents' undergraduate curriculum, as the study abroad program had significant impact on the students' social, intellectual, personal, global, and career engagement (Paige et al., 2009).

Similarly, Braskamp et al. (2009) specified that study abroad is an effective educational experience for students, when the objectives include supporting students to develop cognitively, intra-personally, and inter-personally. In other words, the objective is to help students to develop "holistically" knowing that student engagement in study abroad experiences enhance global learning and development, which are central to holistic student development (Braskamp et al., 2009). Braskamp et al. (2009) specify that study abroad impacted some areas of students' holistic development (i.e., cognitive), more than other areas (i.e., intra-personal, inter-personal) and suggest the need to further explore how various domains of development are impacted by study abroad.

Overall, previous research indicates that participating in a study abroad program is a life-altering experience and that global education programs have a significant impact on the students in varied aspects of their life. Many of these studies were quantitative studies and so it is difficult to determine the nuanced perspectives of how students felt and how they experienced their study abroad program. In the present study, we tap into the feelings of students through their own words and examine the ways they were impacted holistically by the semester long study abroad program.

In addition to adding a qualitative perspective to this body of research, the current study extends understandings beyond the cultural impact and development of intercultural competence. Studies have explored the cultural component of student development alone; we aim to explore students' development holistically.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this investigation is the *Holistic Development Theory*. During the past few decades, there has been a focus in higher education to develop, "*The Whole Student*." Holistic student development is a concept that emerged in higher education (Braxton, 2009; Haring-Smith, 2011; Evans et al., 2010) to prepare the student in all aspects of life after graduation. This perspective suggests that the student should experience personal, social, ethical, and professional growth while they are an undergraduate student. Moreover, faculty should be concerned about the students' intellectual and academic development, but they should give equal importance to their emotional, social, moral, ethical, professional, cultural, and global learning as well (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007).

Experts specify that the holistic perspective is value added to a college degree. Specifically, students develop their critical thinking skills, acquire self-awareness, negotiate relationships, develop empathy, communication skills, and gain a better understanding of people who are different from themselves (Braskamp et al., 2012). Stebleton et al. (2013) specified, "A central strategy for fostering student development is to promote active student engagement in the collegiate experience; yet engagement involves much more than the number of hours students devote to academic activities" (p. 3). Kuh (2009) argues that academic institutions need to develop activities and provide students the opportunity to engage in global learning and international student experiences as a part of their holistic development.

According to the Holistic Development Theory, the study abroad faculty leader plays a pivotal role in developing and delivering study abroad experiences, including curricular materials, planning the itinerary, and planning the program to foster growth in all areas of a student's life (Hovland & Schneider, 2011; Stebleton et al., 2013). As Stebleton et al. (2013) argue, "Within this conceptual framework, activities and programs that are intentionally developed to foster deeper learning and engagement will lead to the development of outcomes that have a lasting impact on students – even beyond college as students become global citizens" (p. 3).

Objectives of the Study

Overall, this study is guided by the Holistic Development Theory to examine how study abroad impacts various factors of students' development. Many global education programs are developed around the goals of improving students' global connectedness, cultural competency, and appreciation for diverse ways of being in the world. While these are the intentions of the faculty sponsors and study abroad program directors, it is important to assess how programming is experienced by the students. Although previous studies have examined the impact of study abroad programs, the extant research has typically focused on one area of student development (e.g., global mindedness), and for those that have taken a more comprehensive approach, it has been with short-term study abroad programs unlike the one we are investigating in the present study. In line with the tenets of holistic development theory, we explore how a semester-long study abroad program impacted various aspects of student development, including personal, academic, social, and professional development.

Methods

Participants

Participants included 80 students on the *Semester at Sea* study abroad program. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years old ($M = 20.23$, $SD 1.09$), and the majority were female ($n=63$, 87%). Most participants were White ($n = 52$, 71%), followed by 11 percent who were Latino, and 8 percent who were Asian. Additionally, two students stated that they were African-American and one student identified as Pacific Islander.

The remainder of participants belonged to two or more races ($n = 5, 7\%$). Over half (60%) of participants were born in the United States, and all participants had previously traveled abroad.

The Semester at Sea (SAS) program is a semester-long study abroad program conducted on a cruise ship that has been converted into a floating university with classrooms, a library, a student lounge, and other amenities. On each study abroad voyage, approximately 600 students, 200 crew members, and 30 internationally knowledgeable faculty members spend the semester visiting 10 to 11 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, and North America.

The SAS program aims to provide “real life” experiences that promote cultural immersion, cultural diversity, experiential learning, service-learning, and a sense of international community (<https://www.epro360.com/theship.html>).

Students attend classes in a variety of disciplines while the ship sails at sea. Courses in approximately 20 to 22 different academic disciplines are offered every semester. Every course has an in-depth “*Field-Class*” component that students are required to take. Additionally, students take a mandatory interdisciplinary core course entitled, “*Global Studies*.” This course provides an integrated and interdisciplinary introduction to each country that will be visited on the itinerary. The course examines the country’s past and present history, traditional and changing political systems, traditions, customs, values, and culture. The course is expected to prepare students for excursions and activities in the country where the ship docks.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study used a qualitative design, where students responded to an open-ended survey. Participants were asked: “*What impact did the program have on you personally, academically, socially, and professionally?*”? Three researchers used qualitative content analysis techniques to analyze responses under the pre-determined categories of personal, academic, social, and professional impacts. Each written response was assigned a code based on dominant messages in the response. Multiple codes were assigned to a response when more than one theme was conveyed by a student. The researchers independently analyzed the data, and then met to compare their coding. When there were differing interpretations, these differences were discussed, until consensus was reached. Once the researchers reached agreement with their analysis, an overall understanding of each theme was generated by integrating codes.

Results

This study assessed the impact the study abroad program had on students personally, academically, socially, and professionally. Students’ responses were overwhelmingly positive. Some students reported general impacts, like the program was a “life altering experience” and “the program had a positive impact on me in every way.” Most students reported themes specific to personal, social, academic, and professional impacts, however the majority of comments pertained to students’ personal growth as a response to the program. The next commonly reported theme was social impacts experienced by students through their interactions with others on the voyage. Many students also mentioned the program impacted their academic learning. Students’ responses in each of these three themes intersected at a subtheme of “culture”. Finally, only a few students mentioned that the program impacted them professionally. Themes and responses are further detailed below. Table 1 below presents an overview of themes and examples of responses from participants.

Table 1. The Impact of Semester at Sea Study Abroad Themes, Definitions, and Exemplars

Theme	Definition	Exemplar
Personal	Personal development of skills, traits, and characteristics, supported personal interests, learning new things about themselves, etc.	<p>“Expanded my cultural horizons, made me more responsible”</p> <p>“I learned how to maintain a positive attitude at all times and appreciate all that I have”.</p> <p>“It was a life altering experience. I feel like I view each country in a positive way, and have broken many stereotypes that I had. I also feel that I have come out of my “shell”.</p> <p>“Personally made me more accepting of others and their cultures”.</p> <p>“I am a better global citizen”.</p> <p>“I realized how privileged I was. I became more aware of global problems and solutions, so that social change can be introduced”.</p> <p>“I grew up a lot. I became humble, thankful, and flexible. I am also more comfortable with the uncomfortable”.</p>
Social	Meeting new people, being a part of a community, etc.	<p>“Allowed me to make friends from different countries and different parts of the US”.</p> <p>“Socially oriented me to other cultures, adapted to other people and other cultures”.</p> <p>“The diversity and kindness of people”</p> <p>“Conversations that I had with most people from other countries/ethnicities around the world. Being a part of the SAS community”.</p> <p>“I loved that my world was open, just by boarding the ship. To live in such a small knit community, with people from over 35 countries around the world has been incredible. There is no other program like Semester at Sea. I’ve never been so close to my professors, deans, and peers”.</p>
Academic	Learning about new cultures, hands on learning, application of course concepts.	<p>“Open conversations on controversial /sensitive issues”.</p> <p>“Learning about other cultures and experiencing them”.</p> <p>“Academically, I saw how the world could be our classroom”.</p> <p>“It made what we were learning in the classroom, come to life”.</p> <p>“It gave me insight into the cultures and places that I never thought I would have learned about, never mind experiences first-hand”.</p> <p>“I enjoyed the application process in each of the countries, as well as focusing on the reflection aspect of what we learned”.</p> <p>“The experiences that we had in port and how we could learn about the country and question that information and then grow from it”.</p>
Professional	Preparation for future careers.	<p>“It makes me want to do more charity work, work for the poor children”.</p> <p>“I think I will grow as a person environmentalist and educator”.</p> <p>“Professionally, it made me stronger and more prepared”.</p>

Personal Impacts

The most common theme included students’ responses related to the personal impacts of the SAS voyage. Many students discussed the skills or traits that were gained as a result of the study abroad program, such as a student who said the program “*expanded my cultural horizons, made me more responsible.*”

Another student explained, *“I grew up a lot. I became humble, thankful, and flexible. I am also more comfortable with the uncomfortable.”* Other students indicated that the program encouraged them to self-reflect, such as the student who responded, *“I realized how privileged I was. I became more aware of global problems and solutions, so that social change can be introduced.”* Similarly, another student explained, *“I learned how to maintain a positive attitude at all times and appreciate all that I have.”*

Responses in this theme also highlight students’ personal growth related to cultural competence. For instance, students mentioned, *“I am a better global citizen”* and *“Personally, made me more accepting of others and their culture.”* Another student explained how the study abroad challenged them, *“I feel like I view each country in a positive way, and have broken many stereotypes that I had. I also feel that I have come out of my ‘shell.’”*

Social Impacts

Responses in the second most common theme pertain to perceived social/cultural impacts of the study abroad voyage. Many students commented on how the study abroad program allowed them to meet *“new friends.”* These responses also pertained to cultural growth through social interactions. For example, one student explained that the program, *“Allowed me to make friends from different countries and different parts of the USA.”* Another student commented that *“meeting people from all over the world was incredible.”* In addition to meeting new people, many students commented on the *“sense of community”* they experienced through the study abroad program. One student specifically responded:

“I loved that my world was open, just by boarding the ship. To live in such a small close-knit community, with people from over 35 countries from around the world has been incredible. There is no other program like “Semester at Sea. I’ve never been so close to my professors, deans, and peers”

This *“sense of community”* provided students the opportunity to engage with others from around the world. One student responded, *“Conversations that I had with most people from other countries/ethnicities around the world”*. Another student explained this impact by pointing out their social experiences, *“Socially oriented to other cultures, adapted to other people and other cultures”*.

Academic Impacts

The third most common theme pertained to impacts on students’ academic development. Responses reveal that the study abroad program provided an opportunity for hands on learning. One student mentioned, *“Academically, I saw how the world could be our classroom.”* Students were able to apply course content to the cultures and countries they visited on the voyage. One student explained, *“It made what we were learning in the classroom come to life.”* In addition, students had an opportunity to reflect on and analyze the material they learned in class during the in-country visits. One student said, *“I enjoyed the application process in each of the countries, as well as focusing on the reflection aspect of what we learned”*. Similarly, another student mentioned that *“the experiences that we had in port and how we could learn about the country and question that information and then grow from it.”* Through this application, students were able to learn about new cultures, which was suggested by one student’s comment: *“It gave me insight into the cultures and places that I never thought I would have learned about, never mind experiences first-hand.”*

Professional Impacts

Students commented least about their professional growth as a result of the study abroad program. Students who did comment on professional impacts mentioned how the study abroad program has prepared them for their future careers, such as *“I think I grew as a person, environmentalist, and an educator. I will be well-rounded”* and *“Professionally, it made me stronger and more prepared.”* Another student mentioned that as a result of their study abroad, they *“want to graduate and do charity work.”*

Discussion

Using a holistic development theory, the purpose of this study was to examine how a semester-long study abroad program impacted students’ personal, social, academic, and professional development. Students most frequently commented that the study abroad program impacted their personal and social development. Additionally, the theme of culture intersected many of these domains. This finding was not surprising given culture does influence multiple aspects of a person’s being and development.

Many students commented on the cultural excursions that they participated in, as well as their interactions with others while in the program. These comments suggest that a high degree of experiential learning occurred during the study abroad program, which may have impacted students' holistic development. We present a discussion of findings by theme below. Consistent with the holistic development theory, findings from this study indicate that domains of development are not exclusive and they mutually influence one another. The intersection of themes is discussed when relevant.

Personal Development

Participants overwhelmingly responded that the study abroad program impacted their personal development. These students commented that the program impacted them as a person and comments suggested that students matured while on their study abroad program. These personal gains may have been at the forefront for students, as study abroad presents many opportunities for independent negotiating and decision-making in a new context. While studying abroad, students are presented with many decisions. Which excursion should I take? Can I afford it? What souvenirs do I buy for my family members and friends back home? This country has affordable clothing, what should I buy for myself? These are questions that students might have gotten assistance with from their family, siblings, and peers before they studied abroad. Now, these decisions need to be made by the students alone. Having to negotiate these factors on your own may foster self-reliance and independence that does lead to personal development. These opportunities might be one explanation for why personal impact was so salient for students. This is a critical area of development where students may need faculty support.

Moreover, many participants specified that they experienced self-growth after the study abroad program ended. Most of the comments pointed to students' increase in appreciation; specifically, how students saw the world and became more responsible. These comments suggest that the students viewed the program in a beneficial way and valued the personal gains experienced as a result of the voyage. Being exposed to enriching and varied experiences, and diverse people is likely to alter a person's way of thinking and behavior and change them "holistically". Other researchers (Harrell, et al., 2017; Mancuso, 2018; Stebleton et al., 2013) also found similar results in their studies, in that, the students' personal development was saliently changed at the end of the study abroad program. It is also important to consider that the personal growth experienced by students could also be beneficial to their social development and interpersonal relationships.

Social Development

The second most endorsed theme from the data included statements regarding the impact on students' social development. Students valued the community and connections they were afforded during study abroad. Their social connections allowed them to learn about others and themselves. Similarly, existing scholarship indicates that fields trips, interactions with local community members, and self-reflection papers were the most important and influential aspects of their program (Gray et al., 2002; Strange & Gibson, 2017). Participants in our study noted how their interactions with locals particularly impacted their social development.

It is evident in our data that social interactions were instrumental to students' learning and development. Therefore, it is critical that faculty and program coordinators ensure they give a lot of attention to and create space for social interaction. Faculty should be intentional about cultivating social relationships between classmates, with individuals in host countries and with professors. Additionally, findings from our study, along with findings from previous research, reinforce the need for students to have an opportunity to reflect on these social interactions.

Students should also be supported by faculty in developing communication skills to be able to relate to other students in the program, as well as locals in various countries. Additionally, faculty can support students in developing their conflict resolution skills. During a longer-term program, it is likely that there will be at least one member (peer, classmate, professor) with whom they would not see eye-to-eye. Therefore, helping students to develop effective communication skills can have a positive impact on their social development during a study abroad program.

The findings from the present study also echo the importance of cultural experiences in students' social development. Several of the students indicated that it was through inter-cultural exchanges and being able to connect with others who had different cultural backgrounds than their own that resulted in significant social impacts. Previous research has also found connections between study abroad and increases in cultural appreciation (Paige et al., 2009) and cross-cultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006) which can explain inter-cultural experiences being socially impactful for students in our study.

More specifically, Vorhauer- Smith, (2013) indicated that after a study abroad program, students' views and perspectives about the world expand. They knew a lot more about other countries and their general knowledge increased. Their understanding and knowledge of cultural diversity and their tolerance for cultural differences also increased, along with an increased self-awareness and level of maturity.

Academic Development

Students who participated in this study seemed to have acquired substantial academic gains as well. Overall, student responses within this theme indicated that the study abroad program fostered a stronger connection to what they were learning in the classroom. Study abroad involvement has been identified as a high impact activity that promotes student engagement (Kuh, 2008). Academically, engaged students are more involved in their studies and have a better chance of completing their program and succeeding. The more that students are engaged, the greater potential they have for learning (Mancuso, 2018). Previous research has also found that participation in study abroad is associated with student gains in various academic domains, including understanding of moral and ethical issues, academic performance, and timely graduation (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Xu et al., 2013). The ability of have concrete experiences, reflective observances, and active learning are key tenets of the Holistic Development Theory. Participants in the present study indicated that they were not only involved in active learning, but they were also encouraged to reflect on their experiences during the post-port mandatory class discussions and reflective writing exercises. Some participants commented on how the study abroad allowed them to apply and question material they had learned in class, as well as challenged their preconceived notions. Giving students the space to process class material and test their assumptions can be a valuable pedagogical approach and may benefit students' academic development. Faculty should make conscious efforts to help students make connections between the academic content that is taught and real-life practices in the other countries in this global environment.

Professional Development

Responses related to professional and career development were the least frequent theme in the data. The benefit of preparedness for professional careers is a major selling point for study abroad programs, especially in the fields of Business, Nursing, and Social Work. The extant research supports the notion that study abroad experiences are likely to prepare students for careers in other international countries and impact learners in terms of intercultural awareness, intellectual and academic development, personal development, and professional development (Byram & Feng, 2005). Students have reflected in previous research that their study abroad experiences help them find career opportunities in the country of their choice, develop interpersonal skills required for the workforce, make contacts for possible internship sites, and identify careers in the countries that they visited (Gray et al., 2002; Kronholz & Osborn, 2016)

Similarly, Di Pietro (2020) remarked that students he surveyed viewed the study abroad experience as an opportunity to develop an internationally oriented career. He added that study abroad programs improve the employment prospects of students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds because traveling overseas widens their horizons, and allows them to meet prospective employers face-to-face. Bomi and Carol (2014) also mentioned that extrinsic motivation such as achieving career goals and listing a study abroad experience on a resume are reasons why many students study abroad. However, findings from our study indicate that students may not have been making connections between their experiences and future careers.

Students seemed to give higher priority to personal, social, and academic gains when compared to professional gains. The word "professional" may have been unclear to the students. Also, many might be thinking that "professional" was too far off, because they still had to complete their coursework at the university before they were professionally employed. Faculty should help students make connections between their study abroad program and how their experiences apply to their future professional lives.

Limitations

Although the current investigation makes important contributions to the scholarship on study abroad and the pedagogical considerations for international education programming, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample consisted of students from various universities in the U.S., but an important limitation to consider is that this study used a convenience sample of students who were enrolled in one semester-long program. Most of these students were enrolled in social science classes. Thus, it is difficult to generalize the results of this study to all students enrolled in study abroad programs.

A future study using a larger sample needs to be undertaken for the purposes of generalization. Future research should also consider both quantitative and qualitative methods to expand understandings of the holistic impact of study abroad.

Similar to most study abroad programs, this study's sample of participants was mostly from middle- and upper-income backgrounds. Many of these students come from backgrounds where they have prior travel experience and had financial resources where they could take advantage of sponsored excursions, cultural immersion experiences, and self-guided trips when the ship docked. For the students on financial aid, this could pose a problem and make their interactions with locals more challenging.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the understanding of how study abroad programming and global education contribute to students' holistic development. Findings from this study lend support to the gains that students make when they participate in a longer-term study abroad program. This information can be used when the program is being advertised, for recruitment purposes, and in pre-departure meetings and post-departure debriefings.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the qualitative results of this study, there are implications that might help future faculty plan and prepare to support students' development during study abroad. First, students should be encouraged to room together when possible. Not only does this give one a financial savings, but the time with the roommates are greatly valued because significant exchange about the excursion and culture takes place in the room. In addition, free time must be given to all students because it is essential to building relationships and having exchanges with classmates and peers. The ability to connect deeply with other classmates opens the opportunity to have more in-depth and candid conversations regarding the learning that has occurred (Davis et al., 2019). Hence, reasonable amounts of "down time" should be scheduled in the course syllabus. Students should be encouraged to spend time in smaller groups working on exercises and solutions to problems or scenarios. This is likely to build and strengthen relationships with peers, instructors, and deans, while abroad.

Informational sessions, study abroad fairs, and pre-departure meetings must highlight benefits of studying abroad in regards to personal, social, academic, and professional benefits. Students who have participated in previous study abroad programs could be requested to share their experiences with prospective students during informational sessions. This may help prospective students understand how study abroad will impact them holistically and the benefits the program may have on various domains of their development.

In an effort to prepare students for real-world challenges, findings from this study support the need for study abroad program facilitators to develop international curricular and service-learning opportunities that foster global learning and holistic student development. Service-learning opportunities would provide students "hands on" experience and more contact with local community members. Students would be able to directly apply their learning and develop skills for their future professional lives.

Another implication for facilitators and educators is to factor in discussions and guided reflection papers throughout the study abroad experience. Generally, global education and study abroad programs provide a learning site for students to experience, reframe, and reflect on issues that are global in nature –this is when a transformative change occurs that leads to a shift in perspective, awareness, and worldview (Stoner, et al., 2014). These researchers further stated that it is of paramount importance that the study abroad facilitator create a link between study abroad experiences and critical reflection. They stated:

Without critical reflection, experiences are just ordinary experiences, and consequently do not provide the opportunity to modify and shape perspective, understand the meaning, and make sense of experiences. It is this reshaping, reforming, and reimagining of perspectives and beliefs that serve as departure points that transformative global learning has occurred" (p. 134).

Overall, study abroad curriculum should be structured around developing all aspects of the student. International travel activities should be intentionally planned and executed to foster deeper engagement among students and development in the personal, social, academic, and professional areas of students' lives. In many cases, areas of development mutually influence one another. For example, social impacts also help students grow personally and academically. Students in the study also identified culture as a theme that cut across multiple domains.

Findings and implications in this paper aim to support the development of study abroad curriculum and program structure that are more comprehensive and attend to the whole student. The findings from this investigation also demonstrate the importance of continued empirical investigations of how study abroad impacts students holistically.

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