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An Information Theory Perspective on Study Abroad: Evidence from Taiwan & Japan

約

この論文は、海外留学と関連する多くの現象を説明する上で、情報理論が有用なツールとなり得る事について言及します。情報理論の5つの概念が海外留学を捉えるための全体的なフレームワークを提供できるかについて述べます。具体的には、L1/L2 チャネル容量(新しい受信情報を処理する機能)を考慮するだけでなく、情報と結果の確率をいかに関連づけることが有益かについて言及します。また、信号処理とデータ圧縮がどのように外国語学習と海外留学に関連するかについて言及します。この論文は、「トランスインフォメーション」とVygotskyの近位発達領域間のいくつかの類似点を概説することで終了します。また、海外留学における情報理論の普及を妨げる3つの問題についても概説します。

キーワード: 情報理論，海外留学，情報処理，認知チャンネル容量，文化的エンコーディングとデコーディング

Over the last several decades, the volume of information about study abroad and international education has expanded remarkably. Now several journals are devoted to those themes, and in the last decade alone over thirty books in English as well as a dozen in Japanese have been published on these topics. As our knowledge about this field grows, the need for a coherent framework to interpret the massive amounts of data becomes ever more acute. This paper introduces one theoretical framework that may provide a useful lens to tie together some disparate research about study abroad and overseas education.

The framework introduced herein is based on information theory, a discipline dating from 1948 when Claude Shannon described how to quantify and encode information without error. Branching out from theoretical mathematics, information theory concepts have been applied in many fields such as computer science (Mazumdar, 2011), sociology (Güçlü, 2012), and psychology (Lachman, Lachman & Butterfield, 1979). One way to describe information theory is as “an exploration of mathematical laws that govern the behavior of data as it is transferred, stored, or retrieved” (Rouse, 2005, par 1).

This paper introduces five concepts from information theory, outlining how they might be relevant to study abroad contexts. It concludes by acknowledging some limitations in attempting to adapt information theory in social science contexts.

(1) Information
Since the advent of personal computing and the Internet, the way many people think of information has changed significantly. Instead of regarding information as a collection of propositions about a given topic, Shannon encouraged us to view it as a sequence of binary, quantifiable codes linking the concepts of probability and entropy to information. If we think of maximum entropy as a state of random “white noise” in which any outcome is possible, then maximum information could be described as a condition of structured order in which specific outcomes become highly likely. Although Cover and Thomas (2006) and Stone (2015) provide a good overview of how information theory can be applied mathematically to concrete situations, this paper outlines a few basic ideas without the arcane algorithms.
Originally, information theory considered data independently of its meaning or semantic content. As Lombardi, Holik, and Vanni state, “Shannon’s theory, taken by itself, is purely quantitative: it ignores any issue related to informational content” (2005, p. 7). Some recent modifications have attempted to evaluate the quality of information transmitted as well as its quantity. Floridi (2002, 2003, 2011, cited in Adriaans, 2013), for example, has described semantic information as well-formed, meaningful and truthful data. Dretske (1981) has shown how semantic data can be “upgraded” into knowledge, suggesting that factors such as evidence, reasons, and the perceived veracity influence how messages are received. He also likened information to a commodity that might—or might not—yield useful knowledge.

If we conceive of information probabilistically as data that makes one outcome more likely than another, then in study abroad contexts it seems important to reflect on whether our desired outcomes are congruent with the information being provided. As Lou, Vande Berg, and Paige (2012, p. 413) attest, in many study abroad programs, outcomes are vaguely defined, inadequately communicated, and inappropriately measured. Information unrelated to desired outcomes is, from an information theory standpoint, essentially noise—or at best, side information. Educators trying to communicate a specific message to a target audience need to consider their “signal-to-noise ratio”: a lot of extraneous information is contained in many information packets that we disseminate.

Information theory encourages us to regard information as a signal that can be encoded in many ways. Study abroad information, for example, can be conveyed through pamphlets, videos, posters, blogs, or direct speech. Moreover, one signal can cancel out another, or potentially augment it if the timing is optimal. As a case in point, my university’s international education office encourages students to study at a sister school in Taiwan. However, one faculty is encouraging students to study at a different university in Mainland China. Essentially, these two messages are cancelling out each other: Few students have the financial resources to engage in both options. The confusion of receiving multiple conflicting messages often makes the likelihood of attaining either less likely. Similar scenarios exist at many schools where multiple study abroad venues are marketed in Anglophone, Francophone, or Sinophone locales: If the information is not presented clearly, students may become perplexed about which place to choose, and filter out the conflicting and confusing messages.

(2) Channel Capacity

Although channel capacity was first mathematically formalized to describe the maximum rate at which communication signals can be reliably broadcast, it is also relevant to the fields of cognitive science and social psychology. Basically, it describes how fast information can flow over a conduit. That conduit might be a fiber-optical cable, a social community, or a human nervous system. In individual human terms, channel capacity is closely related to the notion of cognitive load: the upper limit of the rate at which information chunks can move through our working memory. From an information theory perspective, humans might be described as “noisy channels.” In other words, much of the information heading towards us is either lost or distorted. Often only a small portion of many signals get through. As Vogel and McCollough (2008) point out, we filter out far more than we take in. If a sufficient degree of redundancy and error correction is present in a message, much of the core data can be preserved. Many neurolinguistic studies have revealed that our ability to process semantic data varies widely from language to language. Generally, people can handle information more quickly in their L1 than in their L2, L3, or L4. In other words, channel capacity is partly language-dependent.

What does this mean in study abroad contexts? Many students going overseas become flustered by their inability to handle the huge volumes of foreign language information often encountered in unfamiliar environments. The result is often information overload, which typically leads to either social withdrawal or L1 code switching. Study abroad program organizers need to consider how much information to send out, at what rate to disperse it, and what languages are optimal. An example of inefficient channel capacity use can be seen at the start of each academic year at many colleges: Incoming students are flooded with huge amounts of confusing information.
about all of the study abroad programs existing at a given institution all at once. Since the cognitive workload to process such a large volume of information is quite high, most students stop listening to (or reading) the information after their cognitive thresholds have been reached. A better strategy might be to disperse the key information gradually based on prospective student interest. Instead of transmitting the same broadcast signal to all recipients, it might be more effective to send out tailored broadcast messages based on statistically predictable target audience interests. Google AdSense and Facebook employ such data distribution algorithms: different end-users receive different messages based on their personal profiles and previous responses (Caplan & Boyd, 2016). Moreover, although foreign language channel capacity can increase over time, the process is typically slow and gradual. We therefore need to consider how to encode or “chunk” the core information to obtain desired effects.

(3) Signal Processing
Information theory reveals how signals can be processed in many different ways. Some methods of signal processing are more efficient than others. Basically, foreign language learning strategies can be regarded as a set of signal processing procedures. A strategy typical of many Japanese university students is to look up all unknown words in a foreign language dictionary as they arise. This strategy might work when preparing for school entrance exams in L1 environments. However, it is not viable in most study abroad contexts involving exposure to massive amounts of foreign language input. Students need to learn what Sun, Karray, Basir, and Kamel (2002) describe as “fuzzy signal processing skills” — guessing overall gist and surmising global meanings instead of focusing on individual discrete words. Linguists such as Johnson (1970) and Van Dijk (1980) have emphasized the necessity of focusing on macro-structures more (paragraph-level discourse), rather than solely on micro-content (word-level data). Many foreign language learners seem to lose sight of global gist when exposed to long strings of new data in foreign language.

Dealing with unfamiliar cultural norms also represents a signal processing dilemma. For example, the gestures for confusion, hope, anger, or encouragement vary across cultures and signal errors occur when people interpret verbal or non-verbal cues differently. Study abroad pre-departure training can be described as an attempt help participants process or interpret signals in new ways. Post-return programs should focus on helping participants decipher or “unpack” some of the confusing signals that participants may have been unable to effectively process overseas.

(4) Data Compression
From an information science perspective, we can say that study abroad pre-departure training is an attempt to compress core information about a target destination to enhance the likelihood of achieving desired program outcomes. Information theorists would assert that no noise-free or lossless representation of the overseas experience is possible: Pre-departure programs can only offer approximate overviews of some of the most likely scenarios that might arise overseas. Data distortions are inevitable. Study abroad participants need to understand that theoretical models of what is likely to happen frequently differ from events that actually occur. Moreover, as Bennett (2012, p. 109) and other cognitive constructionists suggest, our understanding of “what happens” depends a lot on how incoming information is processed: Experience alone does not lead to understanding. It is necessary to reformat, compress, and filter perceptual experiences to gain what is generally called an “understanding.”

The U-curve hypothesis (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960) and W-curve hypothesis (Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986; Martin & Harrell, 2004) are two data compression models often used in study abroad orientation programs. The inherent validity of these two models may be questionable, though both might have some heuristic value in providing possible ways to scaffold experiences. However, information theory concepts might provide a more sophisticated cognitive scaffold. Study abroad pre-departure program organizers need to consider what compression scheme to use when encoding the information they wish to convey. How should a huge amount of information about the host country and travel protocols be compressed into meaningful tidbits so that students—who are frequently only half-attentive—can digest it?
This is probably a good point to contrast how study abroad is marketed in Taiwan and Japan. Marketing itself is a form of data compression and manipulation: Study abroad programs attempt to sell promising slices of overseas sojourns to potential consumers. Although study abroad can be described as a commercial commodity that is bought and sold, as Kinginger (p. 218) suggests, it also has the potential to be an educationally valid experience.

Examining the top page of Japan’s government-sponsored Study in Japan! website (Appendix A), one of the first things that might be apparent is how the language choices for this website mirror the linguistic choices often present within Japanese society. Four main languages are listed: Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean. At least 60% of the study abroad students coming to Japan speak at least one of these languages (JASSO, 2017). There is also a sub-menu with seven other less common languages: Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic. It would seem Japan is trying to attract students from countries where these languages are spoken.

Another thing you might notice is how the website emphatically encourages students to apply for scholarships via their local Japanese embassies. The selected interviews of foreign students who have studied in Japan are also prominently placed on this website.

By contrast, the Taiwan Foundation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (FICHET, 財團法人高等教育國際合作基金會) website offers a dual language interface with a choice of English or Chinese, as well as five different rotating images of young people experiencing various parts of Taiwan (Appendix B). An RSS newsfeed, YouTube and Facebook links, and location of three overseas FICHET offices promoting study abroad in Taiwan are also highlighted. A comparison of these two websites appears in Table 1.

Table 1. Some contrasts between the Study in Japan! and Taiwan FICHET websites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study in Japan! website</th>
<th>FICHET website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>size (bytes)</td>
<td>10256</td>
<td>30603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>download time (@ 56K/sec)</td>
<td>2.24 seconds</td>
<td>6.3 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total word count</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>1292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian characters</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>1174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Asian words</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most prominent words</td>
<td>Japan (5.3%), Study (2.6%), Japanese (2.6)</td>
<td>2017 (5.1%), 最新消息 (3.4%), 基金會活動 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lines of text</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of images</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of male/female faces</td>
<td>7 / 5</td>
<td>5 / 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% blank space*</td>
<td>≈ 35%</td>
<td>≈ 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language interface choices</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Approximate values when viewed on a 1024 x 768 pixel-per-screen browser, varies with screen size.

The Taiwanese website attempts to communicate 138% more textual information than the Japanese site: It is more lexically dense. The Japanese site has a clearer focus and its manga-like illustration at the top provides a more striking visual impact. Whereas the Taiwanese website has a limited bilingual interface, the Japanese website offers a wide choice of language options, making it more attractive to those outside the Anglosphere. The FICHET website utilizes SNS resources more than the Study in Japan website. Moreover, the Taiwanese website uses a JavaScript code to promote five different message panels in Chinese and two in English, each directed to a slightly different audience. If we compressed the information in Chinese from one of these looping panels into a single sentence, it might go like this: “Young students—Taiwan is a great place to experience lively, authentic Chinese and your memories of learning in Taiwan will be a lifelong treasure!”

This is but a cursory analysis of how study abroad is packaged in Japan and Taiwan, but it hints at how information about very similar consumer products can be encoded in quite different ways.
6

(5) Transinformation
The concept of transinformation (mutually shared information indicating how closely two entities are linked) is pertinent to international education contexts. Simply stated, for an effective data exchange communication between two entities, a degree of shared information appears to be optimal.

Since transinformation may be a new concept, it is worth explaining carefully. As Figure 1 suggests, transinformation is a mathematical way of indicating how much information that two entities, say X and Y, share in common.

Figure 1. A graphic representation of the transinformation between two fields.

In Figure 1, the darker central area represents transinformation shared by both X and Y. Let us suppose X is a group of people conducting an overseas education program and Y are potential program participants. If X and Y both knew precisely the same things about a given topic, they would have perfect transinformation. However, there would be no new information to learn about that given topic. However, if the gap between the common knowledge of X and Y about a given field was too wide, then mutual understanding or effective communication would be difficult. On a social level, this suggests that there should be a degree of shared background information for optimal communication to take place. A scenario with zero transinformation would be akin to an alien encounter: When an insufficient amount of mutually shared information is present, the transinformation level is low. When transinformation levels are low, outcomes become statistically uncertain. For example, when studying abroad in places where familiar linguistic codes cease to function, often people rely on very basic body language and gestures to communicate (Surkamp, 2014). In such scenarios, the chances of error are high and the information exchange rate is slow. Study abroad participants who have undergone some pre-departure training and target language training should—at least in theory—have higher transinformation levels than unprepared novices. In other words, they should be more adept at error-correction protocols and be able to exchange information at a faster rate.

Perhaps the most useful way for educators to interpret transinformation is in terms of Vygotsky’s (1934, [1962]) zone of proximal development. If there is too much transinformation, chances are there will be a lack of novelty or a sense of overfamiliarity: Not much learning is apt to occur in such scenarios. However, if not enough transinformation is present, the dissimilarities may seem too vast and tasks will likely seem too alien. The Japanese adage tsuki to suppon conveys this concept aptly, suggesting an insurmountable gap that can exist between two objects. In such situations, communication breakdowns become frequent and learning outcomes are uncertain. Ideally, a mixture of new and old information should be present to facilitate mutual understanding and communication.

Transinformation levels can be increased by adjusting messages to the target audience, utilizing an appropriate body language for a given target audience, and providing a sufficient degree of data redundancy—repetitions of previous signals. As stated earlier, humans are really “noisy receivers” with a lot of internal chatter at any given point in time, and chances are other messages are occurring simultaneously.

Conclusion
This paper has briefly elucidated five concepts from information theory and described their significance in study abroad contexts. Reading this paper, some people might question whether information theory provides a working model of actual mathematical processes or merely a set of
metaphors with some heuristic value. The answer is that information theory can probably be used both ways—with several important caveats.

First, information theory has a tendency towards reductionist simplification. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggest, people are much more than disembodied signals. Despite this, viewing people in terms of the messages they are sending/receiving—and more importantly how those messages are being sent/received—offers one useful way to interpret trans-cultural and trans-lingual experiences. As Allen (2007, p.247) asserts, each theoretical lens probably comes with its own set of biases. It would be foolish to suggest that information science is the only useful way of interpreting trans-cultural and trans-linguistic data, but I believe that information theory merits a wider degree of use in our field.

Second, many of the developmental changes reputed to occur from study abroad are not easily quantifiable: often the data does not seem to fit into neat algorithms. We are currently seeing some attempts to quantify at least some of the changes that may occur as a result of overseas experiences. The Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, 2012) represents an example. However, the fact that this instrument is a commercial product that is not open to independent examination makes independent validation difficult. It seems likely that as more statistical software becomes widespread and the field of study abroad matures we will see increasingly sophisticated attempts to quantify some aspects of foreign language and intercultural learning. This does not imply that qualitative research is without value. However, quantitative results—if based on valid assessment procedures—have a greater degree of information density than qualitative results. Simply stated, more information can be expressed with fewer words quantitatively. The problem is that many end-users may not know how to interpret such rarified quantitative information. Since assessment literacy skills are often not adequately taught in many tertiary educational contexts (Newfields, 2006, p.50), this is not a surprise.

A third limitation to the widespread adoption of information theory is that many people do not understand the mathematics underlying it. A basic understanding of integral calculus, set theory, and topology is needed to adequately comprehend information theory. Perhaps a degree of what Brown (1910) describes as “mathematical intelligence” or Gardner (1989) terms “logical-mathematical intelligence” is also a requisite to appreciate this theory in depth. Without a mathematical grounding, the actual mechanics underlying information theory are apt to appear arcane or enigmatic. However, the fundamental concepts of information theory—even without the mathematical detail—have a useful degree of explanatory value. It can offer a practical window to reinterpret how people often change as a result of new information. In conclusion, it is worth remembering we are not merely passive information consumers: We modify the signals we receive and manipulate information both consciously and unconsciously (Salti, et al., 2015). Hence, even those without backgrounds in mathematics can appreciate the core ideas of information theory and the logic upon which information theory is based.

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Appendix A. The top page of the *Study in Japan* website as it appeared in September 2017
Appendix B. The top page of the Taiwan Foundation for International Cooperation in Higher Education website as it appeared in September 2017
Behind the Veil:
Investigating the Academic Experiences of Study Abroad Students

INTRODUCTION
The research literature on study abroad has tended to fall into certain common categories. Distinct strands include the effects of study abroad on language ability (e.g., Dewey, et al., 2013; Freed et al., 2004; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004), the effects of study abroad on cross-cultural competencies (e.g., Anderson et al., 2006; Williams, 2005), the effects of individual student attitudes on study abroad outcomes (e.g., Chirkov et al., 2007; Hernandez, 2010), and the effects of extracurricular interaction during study abroad on language ability (e.g., Tanaka, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002).

These areas of research have clearly contributed enormously to our understanding of the effects of the study abroad experience for its primary stakeholders—the students—and how it may be improved. For professional educators in the foreign language classroom, though, there remains a curious blind spot. Precious little research has been carried out to discover precisely what students do academically when in the study abroad classroom. For those whose job it is to prepare people for this very challenging undertaking—becoming a college student in another language—knowing just what they will be expected to do has significant ramifications for the design of preparatory programs.

Arguably, one reason this area has not been examined more thoroughly is that there may be an unspoken assumption, itself unexamined, that we already know enough about it. Many language educators in Japan are graduates of college programs or alumni of study abroad programs similar to those in which their students will enroll. As such, they possess a native familiarity with the demands of these programs. This familiarity, however, is inevitably based on a unique slice of academic life: a particular academic discipline in a particular program at a particular institution at a particular time. Such an understanding naturally cannot be comprehensive, given the breadth of courses, disciplines, and institutions which comprise the typical study abroad offerings available to potential participants. Nonetheless, a general understanding of what is to be expected is assumed to be a sufficient foundation for the planning of preparatory curricula.

As with Long’s (2005) critique of notional functional syllabi for language learning—they are based on subjective, ivory tower assumptions of what language is about and how it works, but often have little relation to lived linguistic reality—study abroad program educators run the risk of being like the proverbial blind men feeling an elephant. Each of us supposes that she understands what it is that we are preparing the students for, but each of us may have varying, and limited, conceptions—which are in turn all likely to be somewhat at odds with the reality on the ground.

EAP and Needs Analysis
Needs analysis is a well-established cornerstone of ESP and EAP theory and practice. According to Hyland (2006),

Needs analysis refers to the techniques for collecting and assessing information relevant to course design: it is the means of establishing the how and what of a course. It is a continuous process, since we modify our teaching as we come to learn more about our students, and in this way it actually shades into evaluation—the means of establishing the effectiveness of a course. …Needs can involve what learners know, don’t know or want to know, and can be collected and analyzed in a variety of ways (73).
Hyland here emphasizes the recursive nature of needs analysis, as it feeds back into instructional methods and course design, and ultimately serves as a benchmark for evaluating how well the course is serving its stakeholders. Flowerdew (2013) likens effective needs analyses to “job descriptions,” in that they are “formulated by domain experts on the background knowledge, performance standards, and tasks required” who “provide a more reliable source of data than those produced by language teachers and applied linguists” (328). Swales, in his keystone 2004 work on research genres for EAP, refers to no less than seven such professional “informants” he has used, representing the academic disciplines of law, art, psychology, business, dentistry, botany, and medicine. The role of informant in ESP/EAP is thus seen as being naturally filled by professional specialists—established veterans in the target field who provide key insights into the texts and communicative needs of the field.

Yet there is a wholly different category of informant available, embodied in the students who participate in study abroad programs. This type of insider is ideally positioned to offer valuable information on what it takes to survive and even thrive in the foreign academic ecosystem. Making use of student perspectives arguably better matches Hyland’s (2006) call for needs analyses that are essentially ethnographic in nature, utilizing an “insider’s perspective, which gives precedence to the meaning of the event or situation to participants” (66).

Study abroad needs analysis can thus be approached from the same perspective as ESP/EAP needs analysis, in that students will be new entrants in a particular academic and linguistic environment. What this new environment entails in terms of course content, instructional style, classroom and homework tasks, and lexicogrammatical knowledge can and should be the subject of needs analyses.

Setting and Rationale
The present study is based on data collected over two years at a private university in Tokyo, in a department focused on preparing students for foreign academic study. Though only a proportion of the students end up studying abroad, the English classes are premised on the goal of having as many students as possible do so, and of helping the students develop the appropriate academic skills for this. A range of small and large universities in the United States, Canada, and England have direct relationships with the department. The survey was seen as an opportunity to assess the general effectiveness of the department’s preparatory courses by better understanding the specific academic needs of the students while abroad. This understanding could then potentially feed back into the department’s curriculum design and instructional approach, with the ultimate goal of creating better-prepared program participants.

Participants and Implementation
The 28 students whose survey responses form the basis of the study were between their second and third years at the university, and had just returned from their semester abroad programs. The survey was placed online in early January, timed to coincide with their return. The department staff agreed to notify the returnees about the survey through an official email with a link to the survey. At the researcher’s request, the department also sent a follow-up email a few weeks after the initial online debut. Department involvement in the process had been hoped to motivate participation and result in a high response rate, yet the final number of respondents comprised approximately 40% of the total number of study abroad students. This clearly creates difficulties in assessing the survey results, in terms of representativeness and accuracy. This deficiency, as well as other limitations of the study, will be discussed after a presentation of the data.

Study Design
The four major academic skill areas of writing, speaking, listening, and reading were used as an organizing principle for the survey, since the same principle structured the core curriculum of the department’s English program. (Students took separate courses for each of these skills.) Similar questions were used for each skill area to assess what aspects of each skill students found to be the least
and most difficult in their studies at the foreign institution. Questions were also included regarding the nature of the actual assignments the students were given. In addition to specifying assignment types and rating difficulty level through multiple choice questions, survey respondents could comment freely on their personal feelings and give details regarding classes and assignments. The questions regarding skill areas were preceded by a set of general questions about courses, and followed by a set of open-ended, reflective questions. The set of general questions included one which was intended to help the respondents draw a connection between their preparatory studies over the previous year and a half in Japan with their studies in the U.S., by asking them to specify which aspects of their preparatory courses were felt to be the most valuable to them during their time abroad. The purpose of this from the designer’s perspective was to have at least one question that allowed for direct evaluation of the preparatory program by the students. Reflective questions were included in the final part of the survey in order to gather a broader range of student opinion, including advice for future program participants.

RESULTS

Courses
The survey revealed that students took courses in a wide range of academic disciplines (Fig. 1). Figure 2 shows some of the specific courses taken within selected departments or subjects.

- Communication and Media
- International Studies
- Political Science
- Business
- Philosophy
- Hospitality Management
- Religion
- Psychology
- Women and Gender Studies
- Japanese Art and Literature

**Figure 1: Subject Areas**

**Communication and Media**
- Interpersonal Communication
- Nonverbal Communication
- Intercultural Communication
- Corporate Communication
- Introduction to Mass Media
- Introduction to Advertising
- Introduction to Journalism

**Political Science**
- Introduction to Comparative Politics
- Introduction to International Politics
- Globalization (Upper division course)
- Korea and its Neighbors

**Social Sciences**
- Introduction to African-American Studies
- Introduction to Human Geography
- Introduction to Women’s Studies
- Introduction to Religion

**Japan**
- Japan: Living Tradition
- Japanese Literature in the Edo period
- Japanese Buddhist Art

**Liberal Arts**
- Introduction to Philosophy
- Introduction to Religion
- Introduction to Folklore
- Introduction to Psychology
- Western Civilization to 1648

**Hospitality/Business Management**
- Cross-Cultural Communication
- Business Decision Support Systems
- Marketing
- Principles of Management
- Restaurant and Hotel Management
- Organizational Leadership
- Exploring Communication Processes
- Guest Service

**Figure 2: Courses**

Student perceptions of key skills
In order to connect their academic experience in the United States with their prior English classes in Japan, respondents were asked to write freely on which skills gained beforehand were most valuable to them during study abroad. Figure 3 shows key skills mentioned by students in their responses to this question. As can be seen, there is a notable difference between the top two specific skills—writing and presentation—and the other specific skills. In terms of core skill areas, reading and listening were evidently not perceived as particularly helpful, with each being mentioned by only 3% of respondents. This result might be interpreted to mean that those skills were relatively unimportant for them during their time abroad; however, as will be discussed later, certain insufficiencies in their preparation in reading and listening may have contributed to these skills being ranked in this way. Beyond traditional skill areas, respondents also mentioned cross-cultural communication skills and the skill of being able to communicate with professors. Having the experience of consulting with their foreign English instructors in Japan likely helped some respondents deal with the new environment in which such communication is expected and often necessary. At least one respondent felt that such skills were more crucial than basic academic English skills:

All of my English teachers [in Japan] were native speaker, and classes were conducted in English. That improved my listening skills and that I had to communicate with my professor in English improved my speaking skills. In my opinion, rather than contents of the classes themselves, those things helped me so much when I was in my university in the United States.

Figure 3: Key Preparatory Skills

Voices: Surprises during study abroad
One general question asked respondents to comment on what they found most surprising during their study abroad experience. In the responses, some common themes emerged. One was the large amount of homework relative to the number of courses taken. The most frequently mentioned aspect, however, was the style of the classes, in particular the informality between students and teachers. The following comments are representative.

**Homework**
* I was surprised at the amount of homework that students have to do. Students have a lot of homework everyday, and it is usual that students spend whole holidays to do their homework. Even though I had only 4 classes, I had many homework everyday and struggled with them. The amount of homework was beyond my imagination.

**Student/class style**
* Students especially who are from US are really active when they join classes. They are tend to raise their hands to answer their teachers' questions.

* American people talk to others including their teachers… so casually.

* Students eating snacks, professor drinking coke during lecture.

* When I attended academic classes, I felt that American students were impolite to their professors. Some students crossed their legs when they listened to a lecture. Others shook their legs under the desk so they seemed to lose their concentration toward class.

**Communication with professors**
* The professors really cooperate to the students. In Japan I cannot even know the professor's e-mail address. But I knew the professors' e-mail address and office hour in first class and could confer with them on everything- such as class, homeworks and final papers in the U.S.

**Academic activities**
One of the aims of getting “under the hood” of the students’ experience at their foreign universities was simply to confirm the specific types of academic activities students engaged in while there. In multiple choice format, survey respondents reported having participated in a wide range of oral and written academic tasks (Fig. 3). These included many short (one to three pages) and long (four or more pages) writing assignments, formal presentations, and academic group discussion both in and outside of class. Forty percent of respondents met with a professor at least once during the semester abroad. In addition, twenty percent reported having received formal peer assistance from a tutor on campus.
Respondents were asked to rate their listening comprehension level in two contexts: course lectures and academic discussions. In addition, they were asked which classes were the least and most difficult for each context, and why. Figure 5 shows respondents’ rating of lecture comprehension. 21 of 28 respondents rated their comprehension at 60% or above. The data on discussion comprehension (Fig. 6), by contrast, paints a somewhat different picture. An equal number of respondents reported comprehension below and above 60%.

What were the factors involved in each context? In difficult lecture situations, respondents pointed to the following factors:

- Lack of content knowledge (e.g., Corporate Communication)
- Lack of cultural knowledge (e.g., Advertising)
- Technical terms (e.g., Psychology)
- High rate of speech
- “Informal” delivery

As one respondent said of her Organizational Leadership course, “Students need to have knowledge about major company, economics and political issue to understand lecture.” In lecture situations perceived as less difficult, respondents pointed to the following factors as contributing to ease:

- Personal interest in subject
- Low rate of speech
- Lectures followed readings exactly (i.e., content schema activated)
- Knowledge of content (e.g., Japanese culture)

The need for study abroad students to stay abreast of homework reading was made very clear by one respondent, who wrote, “I could understand [the lectures] if I read it before the classes steadily.”

In terms of difficulties with listening comprehension during group discussion, ten respondents (including eight out of the fourteen who rated their comprehension at 60% or below) mentioned high rate of speech as the main contributing factor. When discussion contexts were perceived as less challenging, respondents generally ascribed this to two factors: prior content knowledge or a collegial classroom atmosphere. In terms of the former, two respondents mentioned their familiarity with Asian
or Japanese culture in classes on those subjects as facilitating comprehension and thus participation in discussion. In addition, two students mentioned their own experience in the area of cross-cultural communication as aiding them in following discussions in classes on this subject. In terms of the latter factor, collegiality, three respondents referred to discussion with other Asian students as contributing to this; one respondent referred simply to the “friendly atmosphere” in which the other students were patient with her “bad speaking.” Another respondent mentioned her use of active listening skills: “When I missed what classmates said, I asked them to say their idea again. It prevented me from misunderstanding between classmates and me.” It can be assumed that such an approach would be taken in a discussion context in which the participant felt comfortable. As will be discussed later in the Speaking section, such conducive contexts were not always felt to be present by the students.

![Figure 5: Lecture Comprehension](image)

![Figure 6: Discussion Comprehension](image)

**Reading**

One key question for this skill area was simply what type of material students were being assigned. The survey found that students tended to read more non-fiction or journalistic material than fiction (Fig. 7). As with the survey section on Listening, respondents were asked to comment on which classes were least and most difficult for reading, and why. When students found reading assignments difficult, lexical load and overall reading load were mentioned most often as primary factors (Fig. 8). Respondents were asked to identify factors that contributed to making certain classes easier in terms of
reading. Their comments revealed that skills such as prediction, understanding gist, and deriving lexical meanings from context, as well as the presence of lexical glosses, were often helpful.

Even if I could not understand a specific words or sentences, I grasped what a main idea was or what I was needed to learn from each chapter. Practicing skills for fast reading, for example, guessing words or phrases, benefited me to do so.

Introductory Psychology, because the text gave definitions of important words clearly.

Fiction because I could expect what happens next in the story.

![Figure 7: Reading material](image)

![Figure 8: Perceived causes of difficulty: Reading](image)

**Speaking**
The survey addressed spoken communication in four contexts:
- Academic discussion in class
- Academic discussion outside class
- Formal presentation
- Social interaction

Though not academic, social interaction was included as a type of control context, to offer a comparison with the students’ experience of academic interactions. In terms of presentations, one of the questions the survey was hoped to answer was what proportion of study abroad participants would actually be required to give formal presentations in their courses. It was found that a majority (93%) of participants were indeed required to do so. Figures 9-12 show the respondents’ perceptions of their ability to express themselves in each of the four contexts. Respondents appeared to have slightly greater success in out-of-class contexts than in-class contexts. The rehearsed, solo context of presenting in class also appeared to result in somewhat increased ability to express oneself as compared to discussion in class.

Respondent comments on their experience of academic discussion showed that the pace of discussion in a native speaker context posed challenges for them:
It was difficult for me to participate in academic discussion. When I want to say something about the topic, it usually takes a bit to think how to say that in English. While I'm thinking that, the topic in the group has changed.

It was really difficult to express my opinion when other students are all Americans. International students were more willing to listen my statement.

Certainly not all comments regarding academic discussion were wholly negative, however. In the Introduction to Advertising class, I had some assignments of group research. The assignments were...analyses of advertisements. The group had only two members, an American girl and me, so I had to discuss them with her. It was really hard for me to do that at first, but I came to understand what she said and express myself gradually.

For the academic discussion, we always had a nice chat with each other. We discussed the problems that we have during the internship and we shared the happiness during the work also. However, some of the time, our groupmates are English native speakers. They spoke some slangs and I could not understand properly their conversation.

It is notable that, even though overall success was apparently greater in social contexts, similar problems arose for some students. In commenting on their experience of discussion within social interaction, respondents again referred to pace, as well as to ethnicity as it related to the patience or acceptance of the other participants:

Talking with one person was OK, but it was very hard for me to cut in when many people were talking. It made me nervous when the people couldn't understand what I said even after I said it again.

I tried to talk with American students to practice my English but I was always with Korean or Chinese students because we had much more in common when compared with American students.

When I talk with someone face to face, I could manage to speak English. However, when I talk with 2 or more people, I cannot catch up what they are talking. Therefore it was difficult for me to speak up. I had to concentrate on catching what they say. And because of that, some people think that I am not a talkative.

Writing
As with the Speaking section of the survey, the Writing section attempted to find out what types of writing assignments the students were given in their study abroad classes, and to gauge their perceived ability to express as well as to organize their ideas. Figure 13 shows the types of assignments reported by respondents. Two potentially interesting discoveries arise from this data. One is that certain essay types commonly assigned to the students during their preparatory studies in Japan, such as persuasive and compare-contrast essays, appear to have been assigned relatively infrequently during study abroad. Another is that reflective and reading response writing were the most commonly reported assignments, even though such writing did not form a significant portion of their preparatory work. Variety was the key: Respondents generally reported having been assigned several different writing and essay types in their classes.
In terms of the students’ perceived success in writing while abroad, respondent data paints a mixed picture (Figs. 14 and 15). Results were similar for both ability to express ideas and ability to organize ideas. More than a third of respondents felt they could “sometimes” express and organize ideas in writing. Slightly less than half of respondents felt they could “usually” or “always” express and organize their ideas, while approximately 15% reported that they could “only rarely” do so. In comments on writing assignments, no clear pattern emerged as far as specific linguistic challenges, though difficulties in carrying out library research and the pressure of deadlines were mentioned as factors.

DISCUSSION

Given the relatively small number of respondents to the survey in the present study, there are clearly risks in drawing firm conclusions from the data. Nonetheless, some interesting results appeared in each skill area that may have implications for study abroad program curricula. Data from the section on listening indicates that discussion comprehension often posed a problem for students. Data from the section on speaking also pointed to academic discussion as a problem area. Comments revealed that these two skill factors could interact to stymie participation in discussion, in that inability to understand or to keep up with topic shifts appeared to exacerbate fluency weaknesses. The reading and writing sections revealed
some potential discrepancies in terms of genre between the students’ preparatory and study abroad curricula. Nonfiction and journalistic works were much more commonly assigned for students than fiction. Given the emphasis that their preparatory program placed on fiction reading in the form of graded readers, as well as the common practice in Japan of using edited nonfiction material as opposed to authentic material, this finding was potentially useful. Writing section data showed that students were regularly assigned to do reflective, journal, and reading response writings. Though some instructors in preparatory classes assigned such writing, they were by no means standard throughout the program. The data on causes of reading difficulty indicated, not at all surprisingly, that unfamiliar vocabulary played a significant role in this for the students. This result simply drives home the very real need of study abroad students for intensive study of academic and field-specific vocabulary.

Curricular responses
In response to findings from the study, changes were implemented in certain classes taught by the researcher. In oral communication classes, tasks and materials targeting academic discussion skills were added. These focused on backchanneling cues used by native English speakers to indicate turn boundaries and readiness to give up or take the floor, and the use of natural floor-taking strategies. In addition, an increased emphasis was placed on paraphrasing and clarification question moves in discussion practice. It is hoped that such activities will pay off for students in terms of heightened awareness of discussion dynamics, and greater confidence to participate in group discussion while abroad.

The study also prompted discussion among faculty members regarding writing assignments and reading material in the students’ preparatory courses. Results of the survey showed a large proportion of reflective and personal writing had been assigned during the students’ time abroad. No consensus regarding a response to this was reached, however, with some faculty members citing limited course time and the departmental focus on heavier, research-oriented essays. Members also considered the proportion of nonfiction material used in the department’s English courses, given the study’s finding that fiction was less frequently utilized in the foreign classrooms. Though no official policy recommendations arose from this, most members expressed agreement that a better balance between fiction and nonfiction was a worthy goal.

Reflections on the study
The present study was hampered by several weaknesses. Foremost was the low response rate to the survey. There were likely several reasons for this. First, though the department gave its assent to the study, and agreed to help spread the word about it, the survey was essentially an optional activity for students. Secondly, the survey was offered only in English. The respondent pool was considered to represent the best and brightest of the department, and since they were expected to be at peak form, having just completed their time abroad, it was thought that an English language survey would present little obstacle to them. In hindsight, it is clear that a bilingual survey with Japanese translation would almost certainly have resulted in a greater response rate.

In terms of the content of the survey itself, it might have been valuable to include a question asking students to comment specifically on what they felt was lacking in their preparatory studies, rather than simply telling which parts of the preparatory program were most valuable to them. The choice to include only the latter was made consciously, as a means to give the survey a positive tone, yet this may have resulted in some key criticisms remaining unheard.

Finally, the study did not include follow-up interviews with individual students. Such interviews would undoubtedly have helped to shed light on key issues. Unfortunately, the low response rate directly contributed to this situation. Since a much greater turnout had been predicted by the researcher, finding students to interview was also expected to be relatively straightforward. As it was an anonymous survey, though, it proved challenging as well as awkward to locate the students who had taken it.
From the outset, the study was an attempt to navigate uncharted waters. Though there were clearly several design and implementation problems, the experience of doing the survey was nonetheless fascinating and gratifying. One of the most rewarding aspects was the ability to glean insights through the window of the respondents’ own words. An example of this comes from the final question of the survey, which simply asked respondents to share advice for future study abroad participants. Though this advice is beyond the scope of the present study, one student’s words serve as a reminder of the importance of “soft” skills like not worrying about one’s mistakes:

>You may think how well you can speak English in an academic situation and daily conversation. However, I think it's not so important because if you care much about how well you can speak English, it would be difficult to say your idea in a discussion. Therefore, you should be confident with yourself!

Though inevitably there will always an element of sink-or-swim to the study abroad experience, we as educators can consider ways in which we might better prepare our students to be immersed in communicative contexts which challenge them linguistically and affectively. It is hoped that this study can begin to shed a little light on the lived reality of study abroad.

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References


Look Before Leaping: 
Risks, Liabilities, and Repair of Study Abroad in Higher Education

By Gregory F. Malveaux
Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield (2016)

This book examines American legal cases that resulted from problems that occurred on various study abroad programs and discusses how the institutions might have better handled them. The issues range from illness to sexual assault to death. The 212-page book spells out clearly the risks and liabilities that study abroad programs must consider before sending students overseas and while the students are on the ground abroad. It highlights a variety of situations where careful planning and legal frameworks were not in place and the subsequent repairs that those study abroad programs were required to undertake as a result.

Malveaux presents examples of American institutions and American case law, so the book would be most helpful for American operators of study abroad, internship, and service learning programs. However, it would be eye-opening for any operator of a study abroad program. Readers of this book will get a complete understanding of the wide range of problems that can occur, learn how to protect students from harm, and get a sense of how to protect programs from damage to their reputations or worse.

The introductory chapter discusses several reasons for the increase in study abroad and the gender disparity in study abroad programs and then introduces key vocabulary used in the text. Chapter 2 introduces the three greatest areas of risks and liabilities: medical risks, sexual assault, and supervisory neglect. Chapters 3-5 address each of these in greater detail. Chapter 6 covers growing areas of concern, which include cybercrime and terrorism.

Chapters 7-9 offer ten key points of advice from study abroad experts on best practices. Chapter 10, the final chapter, stresses the value and importance of study abroad programs despite all the risks, liabilities, and concerns that arise from offering them. The appendices include nine sample waiver forms, two agreement forms covering internships and service learning, a health disclosure form, and a study abroad application form.

Examples of Risks and Liabilities
I imagine that many of us in the field of study abroad inform our students of medical risks and caution them about sexual assault and other crimes. However, I was not aware of the extent to which supervisory neglect can be an issue and the ways in which it presents itself. Several examples are given in the book. I can highlight this by relaying a personal anecdote.

One of my university’s American partner institutions notified us that the fee to pick up our study abroad students at a regional airport and transport them by bus to their campus was approximately USD200 per student. This was more than double the price of commercial options, but negotiating local transportation would have been difficult for our students to manage, especially after a long flight. While discussing our response to our partner’s email in committee, I said in jest that I could go with the
students, rent a van, and drive them myself. As it turned out, the price was later negotiated down and that was not necessary.

After reading this book, I realized that the price quoted by our partner institution might have been due to the cost of liability insurance for transporting the students. This book makes clear that the perils of undertaking any such unscripted, unresearched, and unannounced activities with study abroad students are no joking matter.

Among the legal cases presented is one of a professor from Radford University who drove students while on a research trip in the Bahamas. An accident occurred, resulting in the death of a local resident. The situation turned into an expensive legal battle for the professor, who was sued by the parents of the deceased. The professor was not entitled to legal representation from his university, and the legal battle continued for nine years before it was settled out of court (pp. 76-77).

Another legal case (Thackurdeen v. Duke University) involved an unannounced trip by a study abroad program to a beach in Costa Rica. The beach is known locally for its rip currents and has no lifeguard. Consequently, the university was criticized for visiting the beach without any prior research or planning when the trip resulted in the drowning death of a student. The university was also criticized for its poor management in recovering the student’s body (pp.149, 152-153).

In a third case (King v. Board of Control of Eastern Michigan University), a trip to South Africa went awry when a male supervisor (a professor accompanying the students) did nothing to curtail the sexist and hurtful remarks of male study abroad participants to the female participants. This resulted in a lawsuit brought by the female participants (pp. 72-73).

A case at a different university (Bird v. Lewis & Clark College) involved a disabled student who had been assured that a study abroad program to Australia would be wheelchair-friendly. At some points, however, the student had to be carried in locations that had no wheelchair access. The student felt this did not meet her expectations for suitable accommodation of her disability and filed suit upon return (pp. 155-156).

All four of these cases could have been avoided by better supervision of and discussion with the participants. Malveaux presents these cases to illustrate how important it is to protect students from harm and meet their expectations when they are participating in study abroad programs.

Many of us who operate study abroad programs may not like to think of all the possible negative outcomes that can occur. Perhaps we cannot even envision all of them. However, it is abundantly clear from reading this book that students, parents, program partners, and program operators must be very clear on all expectations and have plans for every contingency from illness, injury, and assault to acts of terrorism, natural disasters, and war. The sample waiver forms, agreement and application forms, and health disclosure forms provide useful guidelines, but they will need to be adapted according to Japanese law and/or expectations.

**Bottom Line**
This book examines the problems that can occur in study abroad programs by presenting and discussing actual legal cases involving American students in such programs. Given that America is a relatively litigious society, this book is particularly useful for operators of programs in America or involving American citizens. Although lawsuits are less common in Japan, those of us who work at universities in Japan will find this eye-opening book a useful repository of information about how institutions can better protect themselves and their students. The appendices provide useful templates of legal documents designed to protect students and programs, but they will need to be adapted according to Japanese law and/or expectations.
While travel safety books written for tourists are numerous, this is the first book I have seen in the field of study abroad that addresses travel safety for study abroad program operators. Although it can be quite frightening to imagine the potential financial damages or loss of reputation that can result from problems, Malveaux stresses that it is not necessary to abandon study abroad programs. Rather, he lays out the importance of running programs properly by ensuring there are clear and effective safeguards, oversight, planning, communication, and legal documentation. This book would have benefited from better editing; there were references to cases that were not discussed in detail until later in the book and cases that were not sufficiently explained. Despite this, I highly recommend this book as a handbook for protecting students and programs from risks and liabilities and preventing the subsequent need for repairs.

By Karen Yabuno
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Book Review

Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students Are Learning, What They’re Not, and What We Can Do About It.


ISBN-10: 1579227147

Students often come back from an SA experience saying their life has been transformed by it, and saying they will never see the world in the same way again. Not so, say the authors in this impressively focused edited collection. They deploy psychometric data from a range of SA contexts to back up their point. Having demolished this widely held belief, they then move on to the good news: that SA can change students’ worldviews, under the right circumstances.

A few points of clarification: The authors are all writing from experience with SA programmes that take U.S. American students overseas to study in academic environments for a semester or more. Their interest in language learning is peripheral at best. What really gets them excited is cultural learning: seeing the world and oneself from the perspective of one or more other societies, learning from this and developing a new perspective on life. They build their case that this is not happening in traditional SA programmes, but can happen with the right support, almost entirely on the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a psychometric questionnaire developed by Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003) based on Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (1993).

How do we know that traditional approaches to SA are not working? Because participants in these programmes show no significant gains on pre- and post-tests using the IDI. Such studies are summarised in Chapter 2, by R. Michael Paige and Michael Vande Berg, in a section of the book aptly called “Setting the Scene.” The evidence presented is strong and will be overwhelmingly convincing for those who believe that the IDI is a good measure of whatever it was we were trying to have our students learn when we sent them abroad.

Why is it not working? Put simply, it is because our paradigm for how students learn abroad (“Send them abroad and it will expand their minds”) is a holdover from a previous age and not at all aligned with current understandings of how people actually learn. In Part 2 of the book, scholars from a variety of disciplines explain what their fields tell us about how people learn. Douglas K. Stuart speaks for stage development theory. Milton Bennett looks at how the positivist paradigm, on which the grand tour style of SA was originally based, has been superseded by at least two paradigm shifts. Mitchell Hammer looks at the theoretical basis of the IDI itself, showing its firm basis in the field of intercultural relations. Angela Passarelli and David Kolb explain experiential learning theory and how it relates to SA. James Zull takes the neuroscience perspective. Bruce La Brack and Laura Bathurst give an anthropological view. Victor Savicki explores the psychological angle, and Jennifer Robinson’s contribution focuses on the scholarship of teaching and learning.
The third part of the book looks at SA programmes in which the IDI has been able to detect the kind of learning its authors have found lacking in traditional programmes. What such programmes have in common is teacher intervention. Pre-departure orientation, learning support throughout the SA experience, and post-programme integration sessions are the name of the game. These, in the various forms outlined here, are what make the difference between no IDI score gains and modest but positive gains. Many programme coordinators and professors have paid lip service to the need for orientation sessions that go beyond “Keep your passport safe at all times” and “Don’t be late for check in at the airport” but few have given this need as much attention as Laura Bathurst and Bruce La Brack in their work with students at the University of the Pacific over the past 35 years. They have found that having students work through exercises associated with cross-cultural training, designed to first sensitise them to cultural differences and then provide them with tools for dealing with differences and learning from them, can prime them to learn from the experience of being abroad. This claim would have seemed fairly insubstantial had it not been preceded by such careful demolition of the paradigms underlying traditional programmes.

Lilli Engle and John Engle run a programme in France for US college students which forces the students to do many of the things we hoped they were doing on their own in more traditional programmes: interacting with local people, using the target language as much as possible, following up on encounters that just seem weird at first (culture bumps), etc. Their results (the IDI again) are impressive compared to those reported for traditional programmes. The problems the programme leaders have encountered are also indicative of just how bad the problems of other programmes can be: They impose a strict “no e-mail” rule on student participants, having found that otherwise students will be in constant contact with others outside the French context, blunting and undermining the experience from which they are supposed to be learning. Since most SA programmes do not have such a rule, the danger is that students will spend their time in an online bubble rather than the host community.

For many SA programmes, post-return activities tend to be insipid, if they exist at all: a report, a presentation to younger students, or, in the worst case, a quick “How was it?” expecting a brief answer. Bathurst and Paige show, however, that if students are guided in integrating what they have experienced and hopefully learnt from whilst abroad into their daily lives and future plans once back home, the potential for learning is once again enhanced. They, like many of their fellow authors in this book, come from a background in cross-cultural training and one senses the vindication that the logic of this volume brings to their work.

Other writers in this section of the book offer similar lessons, each from a very specific context. The overall effect of their reports on the programmes in which they are most deeply involved is a very strong argument in favour of teacher intervention before, during and after SA. Clearly there is an agenda here: resources for SA offices on U.S. campuses are tight and constantly threatened. Most of the solutions proposed here, especially those for while-abroad intervention, are expensive. Nevertheless, the educational case for them is strong and this book makes it superbly well, drawing as it does on scholarship from so many fields and real examples from such a variety of programmes. Each of us may have cause to draw on these arguments when fighting our own battles for resources to enhance student learning in SA programmes; my copy of the book will certainly be a constant companion in International Centre meetings from now on.

You will have sensed a note of caution throughout this review about the heavy reliance placed in this book on the IDI. It is not the only measure used, but it is the predominant one. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the validity of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity on which the IDI was based (see Matsumoto and Hwang, 2013 for this) and of self-report data in
general (Nisbett, 2015, pp. 191-203). The IDI, however, does appear to measure something, and that “something” appears to be somewhat close to the vague ideas of the kind of cultural learning many professors hope their students will gain from their participation in an SA programme. However, it is not necessary to be a true believer in the IDI to take on board the fact that an SA programme which includes teacher support for cultural learning in the pre-, during, and post-stages is more likely to reach its goals than one that does not.

The authors and editors of this book have achieved a rare feat: an edited collection of papers which hang together, indeed coalesce, to support a strong central argument. They have done us a great favour in this respect, as their argument is one that is worth making and needs to be made again and again for the good of our students and the integrity of our SA programmes: Teacher support and intervention enhance cultural learning. The authors rest their well-made and cogently argued case.

By Stephen Ryan
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References
Book Review

The First Time Effect: The Impact of Study Abroad on College Student Intellectual Development

Joshua S. McKeown
State University of New York Press (2009)

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In this monograph, Joshua McKeown tackles the difficult task of giving an empirical explanation of how students’ intellectual development is affected by their experiences studying abroad. At a time when globalization processes at universities around the world are increasing in popularity and attracting more students, different types of study abroad programs are being heavily promoted on most campuses. Orientations frequently focus on the cultural and linguistic benefits of studying abroad. At the same time, teachers, staff and students are hopeful for other, more difficult to measure, outcomes. One such important gain is what this 160-page book attempts to assess in its five chapters—the intellectual growth students experience when they study abroad.

For students, studying abroad has the potential to be an eye opening, once in a lifetime experience. Study abroad advisors and faculty members often love talking to returning students, and seeing the changes in them and how much they have grown—observations that have been historically rooted and passed on in the study abroad field since its inception (Hoffa, 2007). Returning students can seem more sophisticated, more focused on what is important and less on the petty and trivial. “She seems more mature,” a faculty colleague would say. “They’re a pleasure to have in class, because they bring a perspective the others don’t” would say another.

This unmeasured change that we detect can be both gratifying and maddening: What changes are occurring, and how can we document them so our colleagues and constituencies can see them too?

In Chapter One McKeown discusses how his study contributes to the current research and understanding of studying abroad and its effect on college students in the U.S. As the Director of International Education and Programs as well as a teacher in the Global and International Studies Department at the State University of New York, the author provides available relevant English language data (2009 and earlier) and a brief look at the evolution of studying abroad. (One immediate weakness of the study is that the author does not look at data in other languages. Few researchers conduct multilingual studies and most rely on references in just one or two languages.) The theoretical framework for this research is also introduced in this chapter, including student development theory, which the author argues is pertinent to shedding light on the effects studying abroad has on student intellectual development.

A literature review follows in the second chapter. The author also claims that he is the first one to “synthesize” the fields of higher education and study abroad by examining the impact of
studying abroad on intellectual development. The author laments how study abroad is often situated outside the realm of higher education— institutions “rarely devote time and attention to assessing [study abroad] in the same way they do general education” (p. 12).

Procedures and study methods come next in Chapter Three, mainly focusing on the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID) instrument and how it was used in this study. Here the author argues that it is important for the different institutions to retain their “true colors”—embracing the diversity and unique nature each one of them possesses. In the under-researched field of study abroad, this book attempts to introduce some empirical evidence, while keeping in mind the realities of campus life.

Chapter Four discusses the results of the study surveys, explaining how intellectual development gains that students experienced during their one-semester study abroad programs varied. Such variances should not surprise the reader, the author assures, and should be looked at in a positive way—one-semester of studying abroad can only help students develop to a certain degree and should be seen as part of the students’ overall learning and growth. However, this study shows that a particular group of students did display a notable gain in intellectual development, and that category consisted of students with no significant prior experience in traveling internationally. This group of students “seemed to benefit the most from studying abroad.” Since the target group in this study was college students who had studied abroad for one semester only (which is a comparatively short period of time spent studying abroad), taking into consideration whether students had had any previous experience living abroad—“a day trip to Canada or spring break in Cancun”—played an important role in distinguishing and comparing the two groups.

I argue here that studying abroad is an activity that challenges students by forcing an intense encounter with diversity. I also argue that studying abroad is replete with stress, anxiety, and intellectual discomfort by deliberately exposing students to alternative environments that require an alternate worldview, and that this is done in a substantive, meaningful way. Lastly, I argue that, as evidenced in this study, this intellectual tension is particularly acute during the first sojourn abroad and may lead to signify gains in intellectual development in participating students, what I call ‘the first time effect.’ This approach in assessing the benefits of studying abroad has not been promoted in this way before.

The author states that “something profound happens during that international encounter” and that his book would explain how studying abroad even for a short period of time improves intellectual development in college students.

Chapter Five is the concluding chapter and in it McKeown suggests that on one hand there is a high demand from students to study abroad and on the other, the university is concerned “erroneously that these programs are of little value.” The author offers his final arguments that studying abroad nurtures intellectual development in college students and therefore higher education institutions should “deliberately harness their students’ interest in travel by designing as many study abroad programs as possible, including short term programs.” Again, he makes the case that both short- and long-term study abroad programs can offer the same intellectual development in students whose demands to experience different cultures, learn new languages, and generally widen their horizons are ever growing. McKeown asserts that study abroad programs offer students the same academic rigor as the programs on their home campus. He
states that, “there is no bad study abroad program per se. There may be bad teaching or poor-quality delivery, but that is no different from higher education on campus.”

The implications stemming from this finding is that studying abroad may have its greatest impact on intellectual development, and possibly on other outcome measures as well, for students without lengthy international travel experience. These students, when compared to their peers, are at a relatively lower level of intellectual development. Some commentators on studying abroad (Kaufmann et al., 1992) believe that gains on studying abroad do follow this pattern. An implication is that students at lower levels of intellectual development, such as first-year students or students without prior international experience, might benefit most from studying abroad.

He closes the chapter by restating that while a larger number of students should undertake a study abroad experience, the biggest gains will be observed in first-time travelers.

**Pros and Cons**

The book looks at studying abroad from an angle that positions it shoulder to shoulder with other educational programs at the tertiary level. It argues that studying abroad should not be viewed in isolation; that students have much to gain when they choose to spend a semester or two abroad. McKeown wants universities to stop asking questions such as “Are students learning what they should be learning about France?” and instead ask, “How are our students changing for the better?” However, at this point in time most of the questions the author poses in his book (a monograph heavily based on his PhD dissertation) seem to have been answered. McKeown talks about the ever growing numbers of students as something new, something to be pushed forward even more. However, today most universities offer a variety of well-structured study abroad programs to students. Many of them assign professors and administrators to not only keep an eye on students’ progress, but also to stay actively engaged during the period of studying abroad. Some also offer scholarships for students to study in universities abroad.

This study takes into consideration only American students studying overseas for one semester. This limits its generalizability to study abroad programs of different lengths and with more ethnically diverse students. While McKeown suggests that the students who benefit the most from an intellectual development point of view are the ones with no prior international experience abroad (arguably, the length of their study abroad not being vital), the book leaves many questions unanswered about other lengths of study abroad, thus leaving the reader with more questions at the end than he or she might have had in the beginning.

**The Verdict**

This book provides some important data, a theoretical framework, and results to help researchers further think about the field of study abroad. At the same time, it provides administrators with ways to better explain what happens to students’ intellectual development while abroad, and also how, and why it happens. However, because this book is dated and the author examines the impact of study abroad from a rather narrow angle for just one specific type of student, my recommendation for this book is lukewarm. While the author acknowledges the limitations of his study and that it is a work in progress, in the eight years since the book was published he has not produced a more vigorously researched work utilizing a wider variety of theories of intellectual
development. It also would be useful if the target group included students from different countries and not only from the U.S. In his review of McKeown’s book Tim Newfields comments, “Indeed, readers outside of the USA might wonder how relevant some of the data from this study is to their students.” Japanese students, for instance, almost invariably need to use a foreign language when studying abroad. Moreover, as Kinginger (2009, p. 12 mentions, “Western European students are likely to have significantly more cross-cultural contact prior to formal study abroad and also higher levels of language proficiency than their North American counterparts.” In short, in agreement with Newfields’ comment above, the time is ripe for an updated study that covers the above-mentioned points and McKeown could surprise his audience with a more extensive study a decade after his original book was published.

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References