

Benefits of Study Abroad Programs for Students of Color in the United States

Introduction

Reports show that in order for neighborhoods to thrive well, there is a need to reduce the gap of education between the lower social economic status students and the higher economic status students. Addressing the disparities in access between low-income students and their affluent peers is crucial to increasing student success and retention through study abroad programs and other high impact support programs. This is important because it sheds the light to the education resources not readily available to low-income students for participating in such courses i.e., access to financial aid, education counselors, books and other significant resources necessary to flourish in higher education. Thus, it helps higher education stakeholders to allocate funds to support marginalized and underrepresented students.

Study Abroad Programs

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address US diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by studying abroad (AACU, 2008). There is no doubt that minority non-White students fail to participate in high impact practices like study abroad programs due to lack of financial resources and support. Although the diversity of study abroad participation has increased

in recent years, minority students are still greatly underrepresented in study abroad. For instance, a previous survey found that in the U.S. Post-secondary Enrollment of 2014-2015, 14.5% of students identified as African American or Black. And, only 5.6% of those students participated in study abroad programs compared to 72.9% of Caucasian students (NAFSA, 2017). Similarly, Sweeney (2015) postulate that students of color are underrepresented in study abroad participation. The percentage distribution of African American students enrolled in U.S. higher educational institutions increased from 12.7% in 2005 to 14.5% in 2010, but the rate of study abroad participation grew at a slower rate, from 3.5% in the 2005/06 academic year to 4.8% in the 2010/11 academic year. For current statistics (See Figure 2).

The Latino/a student population increased from 10.8% to 13% during this period, while study abroad participation grew from 5.4% in 2005/06 to 6.9% in 2010/11. American Indian/Alaska Native students have seen little change in overall enrollment in institutions of higher education or in study abroad participation. During this era Asian/Pacific Islander students participated in study abroad in relative proportion to their overall enrollment in higher education, and since 2008/09 have even participated in study abroad at a higher rate (7.9%) than their proportional enrollment in higher education (6%). The Asian/Pacific Islander category includes many ethnic sub-groups, however, and both study abroad participation and academic achievement vary considerably among these sub-groups (Doan, 2002; Van Der Meid, 2003).

Socio economic hindarance to study abroad programs

There are many factors that hinder multicultural and students of color from participating in study abroad programs. Briefly, I will highlight some of the predominant socioeconomic factors affecting the said student population.

Habitus. Social class may be perceived not only as the economic position people occupy in a society but as “attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of one’s social world (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). A student’s habitus is influenced by social class background and race, and such orientations and dispositions can shape expectations of, and participation in, study abroad (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). In fact, high economic status students are more likely to participate in study abroad programs compared to their lower economic counterparts due to their parents influence.

Institutional support. Students who attend affluent education institutions are more likely to be influenced to participate in study abroad programs because of strong support and guidance from education counselors. On the contrary, student who attend impoverished institutions are susceptible from receiving such an opportunity (Sweeney, 2015).

Financial Support. As stated before, the costs of studying abroad has closed doors for many students willing and inclined to experience such an opportunity (See Figure 3, 4). In fact, this is the number one reason for why many lower socioeconomic students fail to participate in study abroad trips. Black and lower socioeconomic status students are often dependent on financial aid and cannot afford the additional expense of an overseas educational experience [19, 23]. According to Hembroff and Rusz [4], many minority students work during the summer when many study abroad programs occur.

These situations present a difficult decision for students who would have to forego earnings and/or to incur new costs to study abroad.

Acknowledging such disparity, this research seeks to unveil the benefits of study abroad programs relevant to student persistence and retention, more precisely for students of color.

Review of Literature

The topic surrounding benefits of study abroad programs for students of color has not been fully explored. A small number of articles explored strongly identify advantages of such high impact practices for students of color in the United States. Some of the themes noted in the articles identifying these benefits are noted below.

Persistence. There is no doubt that students who are highly engaged in extracurricular activities are more prone to succeed in their academics compared to students who do not (personal communication, 2017). Likewise, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) suggests “students who engage more frequently in educationally effective practices get better grades, are more satisfied, and are more likely to persist” (NSSE, 2006, p. 9). These educationally effective practices include study abroad programs, internships, service learning, and experiential learning activities (Malgrem & Galvin, 2008). Even more, similar studies suggest that “Students who study abroad report greater gains in intellectual and personal development than their peers who do not have such an experience” (Indiana University, 2007). Holmes (2008) expounds that study abroad programs provide students’ of color with class credit and makes them more marketable when job hunting. Furthermore, Starlett (1998) insists that collegians

who study abroad tend to enhance their resumes and acquire competitive edges for employment in the global market. Offering such opportunities not only improves the well-being of multicultural and students of color but also it paved a way for vibrant communities in the United States.

Personal development. The term *development* is defined as the organization of increasing complexity and is distinguished from *change* (which refers to only an altered condition that may be positive or negative, progressive or regressive) and from *growth* (which refers to expansion, but may be either favorable or unfavorable to overall functioning (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Student development theory realistically can be used to promote development in students' in and out of class experiences; also it could be crafted to empower working study students with skills necessary to navigate their work environment (Cross, 2017). In relation to that, Day-Vines, Barker, and Exum (1998) examined the impact of a study abroad program in Ghana on 18 African American students, concluding from student essays that the program enabled these students to (a) reject stereotypes, distortions, and omissions related to education about Africa and to substitute more accurate representations; (b) experience the emotional link to their slave history; (c) examine American cultural values critically and analytically; (d) experience growth in terms of ethnic identity, racial identity, and intercultural sensitivity; and (e) experience enhanced achievement and motivation. It is worth pointing out that although some of these benefits conceivably accrue to all study abroad students, some are clearly unique to the African American students (Murray & Fry, 2010). Such programs, help students to develop solid self-esteem and identity pride.

In parallel studies, Tsantir (2005) also examined the benefits of study abroad for a large number of heritage-seeking multicultural students that included Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans. Tsantir explains that for heritage-seeking students, study abroad is an exploration of their own identities; and that although most (majority) study abroad students expect to be challenged by the culture, heritage seekers often expect to feel a sense of homecoming and acceptance (Murray & Fry, 2010). Nevertheless, students are able to create lasting memories and develop new friendships (Holmes, 2008). For instance, one African American study abroad participant from Brown University (2001) stated,

I am of African descent and have always wanted to go to Africa. I chose Ghana because it is an English-speaking country with a history of slavery. I think that my identity as an American influenced the way I was treated more than anything else. People can always spot Americans which will spark admiration as well as dislike. Ghana is very interesting for a black American because when you get there you are considered and called “white” because you are so westernized. Many Black Americans have many issues surrounding this. Ghanaians are also very religious (Christianity and Islam). Being of African descent and going to Ghana made me definitely realize how African- American I am. While my culture has definitely retained many African influences we have also created our own culture out of our own experiences.

Evenmore, group diversity is portrayed through a White female study abroad participant from Brown University studying in Tanzania. During her trip she expressed culture shock.

It was my first experience of being part of a (white, expat) community. If I had been an African-American (instead of Anglo-American), it might have been more difficult, as Tanzanians could of course distinguish all foreigners, regardless of skin color. Everyone got called “mzungu” (usually translated, “white person”) I would not say that I experienced discrimination, as I believe that the social group with the most privilege cannot, by definition, experience this. However, because I am a (white) American, many people assumed I was extremely wealthy and asked me to give them money. Although, I could not blame them for this perception (as comparatively, I am wealthy), it was a source of frustration at times. It was simultaneously apparent that I was 1) a Westerner (American), 2) a minority due to my 3) physical appearance. All solicited the same response: attention—stares, often comments (“mzungu!”), sometimes requests (i.e., for money, etc.)

Despite all the disparities in study abroad experiences, in general, the benefits of multicultural student participation in study abroad programs extend beyond the students themselves. Thus, it includes their student peers, their own local communities, their host countries, and of course, the global community.

Economic impact for study abroad candidates

The benefits of study abroad programs are exponent to students and the community as whole. This type of global experience is also advantageous in the domestic and international job market, especially in foreign policy and other internationally related occupations. In fact, study abroad is considered to be a prerequisite for careers in the international arena including work in organizations such as the United Nations, the World

Bank, and the Foreign Service (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). A number of research has identified this longterm advantage to the students, community and nation as a whole (See Figure 1).

97%	of study abroad students found employment within 12 months of graduation, when only 49% of college graduates found employment in the same period. (1) That means they were twice as likely to find a job. Among study abroad alumni, 90% landed a job within 6 months. (2) A UK study supports US findings that study abroad returnees are more likely to find employment within six months. (12)
25%	higher starting salaries: that's how much more study abroad students earn than those college graduates who do not study abroad.(1) A British study found their study abroad graduates out-earned their peers by 17%. (12) This equates to approx. \$7,000 annually for US students and £3,120 for UK students. Maintaining this earning advantage translates to earning an extra \$567,500 over one's career in the US. (3)
90%	of study abroad alumni who applied got into their 1st or 2nd choice grad school. (1)
84%	of study abroad alumni felt their studies abroad helped them build valuable skills for the job market. (4) A second study confirms this at 85%. (10)
80%	of study abroad students reported that study abroad allowed them to better adapt better to diverse work environments. (4)
70%	of study abroad alumni claimed that because of study abroad they were more satisfied with their jobs. (4)
59%	of employers said study abroad would be valuable in an individual's career later on with their organization. (11)
34%	of study abroad alumni claimed that study abroad helped them choose their career field. (4)
19%	lower unemployment rates were found among study abroad alumni according to a British study. (4)
+	A British study found the greatest increases salary earnings among study abroad alumni (compared to their peers) among seven majors: sociology, computer science, theology and religious studies, electronic and electrical engineering, and physical geographical sciences. (4)

Fig. 1. Statistics on study abroad impacts for student careers, and general economic impacts.

Limitations

Surprisingly, little research has focused on direct correlation between study abroad programs and admission to Ivy league institutions. Most of the research explored have contradictory message in regard to how study abroad experience looks on a students application to college. Research indicates studying abroad experience is not a key criteria that college admission counselor look for when admitting students. Students who build houses in Costa Rica for a week, might be surprised to learn that none of that is particularly compelling in the highly selective admissions process. Some admission counselors find community service abroad sounds a bit like spring break with some feel-good work thrown in for better optics (Heaton, 2017). On the other hand, Sloane (2014) mentions that studying abroad is not just another extracurricular to add to your list, but an overarching experience that says so much more about you than most other items on that list ever could. Alexander Posner, who will be entering Yale University this fall, said there is no doubt a study abroad experience helps students stand out in the admissions process. Posner studied in Costa Rica with Sol Abroad. Regardless of the outcome, an overarching number of scholars including Cross (2017) agree that studying abroad is crucial for building a stellar portfolio that can help get admission in a prestigious school.

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APPENDICE

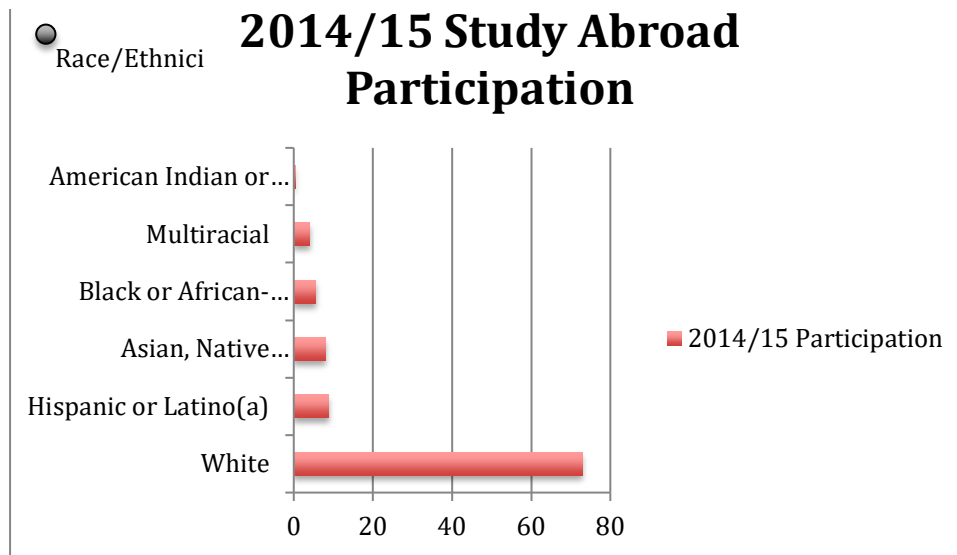


Fig.2. Profile of U.S. study abroad students

<https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Student>

COSTS FOR STUDYING ABROAD-EAST AFRICA

SIT Tanzania: Wildlife Conservation & Political Ecology

Country: **Tanzania**

City: **Arusha**

Term: **Fall 2017**

Residency Status: **In-state**

Instructional Costs (IC)*	\$17,075
Health Insurance (OT)*	\$80
Housing & meals included in fee (OT)*	\$2,960
Education Abroad Program Fee	\$20,115
Books & Supplies	\$500
Personal Expenses	\$1,335

Airfare	\$1,400
Estimated Costs not included in Program Fee**	\$3,235
*Billing code Total Estimated Budget	\$23,350

Fig.3. Costs of studying abroad Arusha, Tanzania. Source: CU Boulder

Locations	Africa » Rwanda
Subject Areas	African Studies
Arts	Conflict Studies
Cultural Studies	Education
Global Studies	International Relations
Liberal Arts	Peace Studies
Performing Arts	Service Learning
Social Sciences	Social Work
Theater, Drama and Dance	Timeframe
Summer	Accommodation
Guesthouse	Hostel
Hotel	Language
English	Steps
Online Application	Currency
USD	Cost Description
<p>Dates: June 4-24, 2017 June 25-July 15, 2017</p> <p>Program Fees: \$2,960</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participant confirmation: \$300 - DBE certification fee: \$250 - Educational costs: \$1,030 - Housing/meals: \$1,320 - Insurance: \$60 	

Fig.4. Cost of studying abroad in Rwanda