

# THE GENDER GAP

IN POST-SECONDARY STUDY ABROAD

UNDERSTANDING AND MARKETING  
TO MALE STUDENTS

BY STEVEN W. SHIRLEY, PH.D.





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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF:  
CHARLES EDWARD PETERSON  
MARGARETTE MARIE PETERSON  
NORMAN ALEXANDER SHIRLEY

DEDICATED IN HONOR OF:  
VESPER ELIZABETH SHIRLEY



## ABSTRACT

Given the post-September 11, 2001, environment, a renewed focus has been on broadening the global perspective of American university students. During the past 20 years, the participation rate of American college and university students studying abroad has grown tremendously. International education has experienced much growth and increased attention; yet, despite the interest, enrollment in these programs has consistently been primarily by females with only limited participation by male students. Study abroad professionals have speculated about this gender gap, yet very little research has been completed to understand the disparity. This study examined differences in how males and females perceive studying abroad to potentially find ways of encouraging more males to study abroad.

A total of 179 students from 14 universities completed a survey about their fall 2003 study abroad experience. They reflected on motivations and potential obstacles for studying abroad, influential people and organizations that helped with their decision, likelihood to repeat their experience, and perceived benefits from studying abroad. Additionally, demographic data such as academic major, GPA, location, and grade classification were analyzed along with differences in responses between genders.

Seven research questions searched for potential differences between males and females regarding their overall perceptions of the study abroad experience. Three significant differences found between genders were (a) females stated parents and other relatives were a greater positive influence in their decision to study abroad than for males, (b) females felt interference with an internship or job as well as the overall cost of studying abroad represented greater obstacles than did males, and (c) males more strongly felt studying abroad delayed their potential graduation date than did females.

Since few differences were found between males and females in their perceptions regarding the study abroad process, campuses must re-evaluate their current marketing processes and strategies to ensure that they actively promote to all potential participants. Universities working to increase their male study abroad participation should reassess their campus study abroad offices, personnel, and marketing materials to identify creative ways to influence males to study abroad.

# CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

[T]he exchange of students...should be vastly expanded....Information and education are powerful forces in support of peace. Just as war begins in the minds of men, so does peace.

- [President] Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1958. (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2005b, para. 9)

## **Background of the Study**

Nearly all American colleges and universities attempt to implement some component of internationalization into their curricula. Attempts to include internationalization can take many forms and may include incorporating it into an institution's mission or strategic planning efforts, offering academic degrees focused around foreign languages or international relations, embracing campus-wide diversity or cultural awareness efforts, or encouraging its students to actively pursue studying abroad in a foreign country. These institutional efforts are all geared toward creating a class of students with a better understanding of the world they will encounter upon graduation.

One academic activity that has been increasing in American institutions of higher education is study abroad. Historically, study abroad was an activity predominantly composed of participants majoring in such fields as art, history, humanities, political science, and foreign language. Moreover, the typical participant was a female student going abroad for a full academic year during her junior year. The entirety of coursework taken abroad was from within her major field of study and the academic credits were guaranteed to transfer back to the home institution (Hoffa & Pearson, 1997).

However, in looking at study abroad today, the concept has now radically grown to provide a much greater array of opportunities for all majors. Moreover, students can pursue the opportunity at virtually any stage of their academic career. Additionally, many students now use study abroad as an opportunity to explore topics or subject matter outside their primary academic discipline. Highlighting the continued growth is the fact that study abroad participation among U.S. college students has grown 151% during the past decade (Institute of International Education, 2005c).

University administrators are increasingly recognizing the importance of, and demand that exists for, study abroad endeavors. Significant attempts, therefore, are currently underway at many American colleges and universities to increase the number of students who participate in a study abroad experience. The vision of higher education personnel is that by taking advantage of a study abroad opportunity, its graduates will be better prepared to live, function, and succeed in the world around them. Additionally, such students will have a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity existing among different people and cultures around the globe. "Study abroad is narrowly defined as only those students who received academic credit from a U.S. accredited institution of higher education after they returned from their study abroad experience" (Institute of International Education, 2005d, para. 8). Administrators and study abroad professionals hope these study abroad opportunities will enhance the overall collegiate experience and provide a more comprehensive academic experience for their students.

Colleges have long tried to encourage students to enrich their academic careers by experiencing a foreign college, university, or other academic institution. In today's world, study abroad programs are available for virtually any academic field of study. Moreover, these experiences are available for all ranges of academic standing (first-year students through seniors and even graduate students) and vary from an inter-session term (often January or May), to a summer program (often six or eight weeks), a semester, or a full academic year. Additionally, federal financial aid is applicable to study abroad, and programs are available in virtually every country around the globe (the only exception being countries deemed too dangerous or risky in which to study). Students can also complete internship or cooperative work experience requirements through studying and working abroad. In other words, because of their great flexibility and the wide variety of options available, study abroad experiences are meant to appeal to virtually any college student, regardless of academic discipline, financial ability, ethnicity, age, or gender.

In addition to the importance of studying abroad being emphasized within the colleges and universities, there is now significant encouragement coming from other external constituents. Given recent geo-political issues involving terrorism, war and conflict, diplomatic breakdowns, health concerns, technological advancements, and global economics, study abroad is now being deliberated in a far more significant manner. The interconnectedness of global societies and the fragility of the international framework are demanding that America's future political, business, educational, and social leaders (i.e., today's college students) have a better understanding of this overall system.

Recent global developments and the changing complexity of the role of the United States in a post-September 11, 2001, world underscore the importance of study abroad. More emphasis is required on America's future leaders and decision makers to study and live abroad to better understand and appreciate other cultures. Arguably, the best and most appropriate time for individuals to learn about the global framework is while enrolled in their post-secondary studies. This is a time when individuals are most open to learning and experimenting with new ideas, thoughts, and philosophies.

Collegiate study abroad participation has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, and the total number of students abroad during part or all of the academic year reached an historic all-time record level in the 2003-04 academic year. Commenting on the record number of study abroad participants for 2003-04, Dina Habib Powell, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, said, "I am pleased that American students are studying abroad, which signals their keen interest in learning more about the people and nations beyond our borders" (Institute of International Education, 2005e, para. 3).

Considering immediate past history, the growth of study abroad is even more impressive. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and ensuing military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the potential global outbreak threats of the SARS and flu viruses, an ongoing threat of terrorism against the United States, the increasing political instability in several regions of the world, and a near-worldwide economic slowdown/recession in 2001 have all led to a tumultuous global environment. Despite all these developments, study abroad participation still increased from 143,590 students in 1999-2000 to the 191,321 who studied abroad in 2003-2004 (Institute of International Education, 2005c). This is an increase of over 33% during four very turbulent and unstable global years.

In addition to the number of students studying abroad, there has also been an explosion in the number of study abroad program offerings developed by colleges and universities. These increases indicate that college students are not only more willing to engage in study abroad, but they have come to expect this educational service from their university. Furthermore, university faculty, administration, academic advisors, and study abroad personnel are supportive and encouraging of this student interest. The students as well as faculty and staff now view study abroad as a necessary offering within the collegiate experience.

### **Need for the Study**

Despite the significant interest and continued increases in study abroad participation, one constant trend has been that the overwhelming majority of all students studying abroad are female. Sixty-six percent of all American post-secondary students abroad during the 2003-04 academic year were female, while only 34% of participants were male. The 2003-04 academic year is not unique; studies conducted every year by the Institute of International Education in the past two decades have indicated the consistent occurrence of this gender participation imbalance. In fact, the 34.4% figure for male participation in 2003-04 is actually the lowest percentage for males in the past decade (Institute of International Education, 2005c). When it comes to American college and university students studying abroad, there clearly seems to be a "gender gap" favoring female participation and the problem shows no signs of improving (it may actually be getting worse).

This gender gap would not be an issue if it accurately reflected university enrollments. In other words, if 66% of all U.S. college students were female and 34% of all college students were male, then the study abroad enrollment figures would accurately reflect the proportionality of participation based on overall collegiate gender enrollments. However, the United States Department of Education reported that during its most recent years of statistics (2002), 56.6% of the enrollment at all degree-granting institutions of higher education were female while 43.4% were male. These gender percentages were similar to the previous two years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Likewise, the percentage of students who studied abroad during that time frame who were female has remained at 65-66% each year. Therefore, a significant gender disparity exists in study abroad participation.

Based on the numbers, of the 191,321 students who studied abroad during 2003-04, 65,814 (or 34.4%) were male and 125,507 (or 65.6%) were female. If male students studied abroad in the exact same proportion that they were enrolled in colleges and universities, then there should have been a total of 98,613 males abroad during 2003-04 (assuming that there were the same current level of 125,507 female participants). This would be a total of 224,120 study abroad students if the genders participated in the exact same proportions in which they are enrolled in colleges and universities. Herein lies the crux of the issue – the total number of U.S. students studying abroad would grow quite significantly (by 32,799 or over 17% according to 2003-04 figures) if males studied abroad at the same rate of current female participation proportionately relative to their overall college and university enrollment rate. These additional 32,799 students abroad would help to begin achieving institutional goals of increased enrollments representing a more educated graduating class with a better informed international perspective. This increase would also help to assist achieving goals set forth by such external constituents as the federal government and corporate employers.

These facts, then, provoke the question of why males seemingly choose to not participate in study abroad experiences at the same rate as females. Furthermore, it is important to determine what can be done by study abroad professionals as well as faculty, academic advisors, and administration to encourage male college students to explore their options and make studying abroad a reality.

An argument that has long been used to justify this gender disparity for study abroad is that participants come from a narrow field of study that includes majors and programs that are primarily “female-dominated.” While this argument may have been true at one time, it is certainly not the case today. Academic fields of study that traditionally have had higher male enrollments such as Physical Sciences, Engineering, Mathematics, Computer Sciences, and Agriculture represented only 7.7% of all study abroad students in 1985-86 (Institute of International Education, 2003). In 2003-04, those same five degree areas comprised 12.9% of study abroad participants representing an increase of nearly 68% (Institute of International Education, 2005a). According to the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, the number of bachelor degrees awarded in 1985-86 in those five degree areas consisted of 75.8% males, and in 2002-03 (the most recent data year available) those five areas were comprised of 71.3% males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Therefore, the historical gender balance in these fields has changed very little in two decades and the fields are still dominated by male students.

Consequently, fields of study that traditionally have had higher female enrollments such as Social Sciences, Humanities, Fine/Applied Arts, Education, and Foreign Languages represented 67.4% of all students who studied abroad in 1985-86 (Institute of International Education, 2003). In 2003-04, those five degree areas comprised only 55.1% of study abroad participants representing a decrease of over 18% (Institute of International Education, 2005a). According to the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, the number of bachelor degrees awarded in 1985-86 in those five degree areas consisted of 62.5% females, and in 2002-03 those five areas were comprised of 66.7% females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Therefore, the historical gender balance in these fields has also changed very little in two decades and the fields are still dominated by female students.

These numbers are significant as they suggest a substantial increase in study abroad participants from traditional “male-focused” fields of study, and a decrease in study abroad participants from traditional “female-focused” fields of study. One would expect these results to yield similar representative increases in the number of males studying abroad. However, as previously noted, that has simply not been the case as the proportion of male study abroad participants has consistently remained between 34.4% to 35.4% of overall participants during the last nine academic years with no significant increases or decreases noted in their participation. Moreover, the balance of students enrolling in these fields has remained relatively unchanged as Physical Sciences, Engineering, Mathematics, Computer Sciences, and Agriculture are still male-dominated and Social Sciences, Humanities, Fine/Applied Arts, Education, and Foreign Languages are still female-dominated.

A gender gap clearly exists in today’s study abroad environment. However, it is not enough to simply recognize the existence of this gap and why it exists. Instead, there must also be a concerted effort made from a marketing and promotional perspective. The study abroad profession must not only acknowledge the disparity, it must also seek to understand what factors are contributing to the successful enrollment of those males who are studying abroad. If those factors can be better understood and appreciated, it should serve to further encourage additional males to study abroad.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gather data to explore differences between males and females regarding their perceptions, experiences, influences, perceived barriers, and overall thoughts toward studying abroad. This was accomplished by developing a survey instrument and administering it to select college students who studied abroad during the fall 2003 semester or quarter. The study focused on obtaining participation from a wide variety of students who studied in a broad array of geographic locations. Surveying students upon their return from a semester-long program identified both the motivations why the student opted to participate in a study abroad program as well as their reflections on the actual experience.

## **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study are especially significant to study abroad professionals, academic advisors, faculty members, and administrators at post-secondary institutions across the United States. The current gender disparity of study abroad participation has long been an issue of concern within the profession. College and university study abroad personnel are constantly trying to identify ways of increasing their overall student participation. They have especially acknowledged the disproportionately fewer number of males who participate, yet little has formally and systematically been done to create any significant changes.

This study will help in providing a better understanding of what appeals to college students, and, consequently, how colleges can better reach out to a larger number of male students who have not considered studying abroad or are reluctant to do so. The rationale and influential factors of male study abroad participants can then be identified and compared with female respondents to identify potential differences. Significant differences could then be noted and applied in a marketing context to persuade and encourage students based on their genders and those differences. Upon gathering these data and formulating some fundamental marketing strategies, it may enhance marketing efforts for study abroad professionals to market their programs to a broader spectrum of male students. Additionally, with an increasing number of external organizations stressing the importance of preparing American post-secondary students to better understand other cultures in a post-September 11 world, study abroad participation will continue to be a critical element in the American higher education system.

## **Research Questions**

The differences between males and females in their perceptions of the process leading up to studying abroad and their feelings about the actual experience of studying abroad will be assessed with the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the motivating factors that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
2. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
3. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad?
4. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the promotional activities that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
5. Is there a significant difference between males and females in how they viewed the perceived benefits of studying abroad?
6. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program?
7. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over?

## **Delimitations**

There were several delimitations to this study. These delimitations included the time frame used for data collection, the length of time the respondents actually studied abroad, and the use of an electronic survey instrument.

The first delimitation concerned the time frame that was used in gathering data. The population of respondents included students who studied abroad during the fall 2003 semester (or quarter). Most of these students had returned to the United States from their experience abroad by late December 2003 or January 2004. The survey itself was not sent out until June 2004 and responses came in during July and August 2004. Therefore, students were responding to questions and offering their responses 6-8 months after they had returned from their experience abroad. Furthermore, some of the questions posed in the survey focus on the influential factors leading up to the student's decision to study abroad. These thoughts and motivations go even further back as they center on the respondent's mindset prior to their study abroad departure. Both of these issues represent a significant time lapse, and students may have forgotten details during that time. Therefore, information critical to the survey questions simply may not have been as fresh in their minds during the time they were answering those questions.

A second delimitation concerned the length of time the respondents in this research spent studying abroad. All participants studied abroad only during the fall academic semester or quarter. Those students who studied abroad for a full academic year or who only studied during an intersession or a summer session were not included. Data from participants with a wider array of study time periods could have yielded additional valuable information.

A final delimitation was the survey instrument itself. The survey was distributed to all participants electronically via email. Students may have misinterpreted a question or responded in a way that did not accurately reflect their true feelings. Moreover, the electronic format may have been intimidating or uneasy for students who were not comfortable in submitting information in such a manner.

## CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the current literature related to the study. A complete review of existing literature in the study abroad field was conducted and included academic journals, research from study abroad associations, dissertations and theses, governmental data and reports, collegiate study abroad offices, and a variety of other higher education resources. The following topics are addressed: rationale for studying abroad, cultural adjustment while studying abroad, potential obstacles to studying abroad, external forces encouraging study abroad, growth potential of study abroad, and gender in study abroad research.

### **Background**

The main inspiration for this study has evolved from the researcher's academic experience in the study abroad profession as well as in the discipline of marketing. This study was designed to investigate the gender gap existing among students who study abroad as well as to offer possible solutions to this problem from a marketing perspective. However, no substantial research was found on the so-called "gender gap" in study abroad participation. Despite the growth of American students studying abroad, actual research on study abroad participants is quite limited. Much of the existing research is on language acquisition, academic outcomes of study abroad, and reflections on personal growth (Dolby, 2004).

In seeking other research that has been completed on the gender subject, no comprehensive research was identified. Instead, topics relating to study abroad addressed such issues as cultural appreciation, diversity awareness, learning outcomes, relationship to specific fields of study, assessment of learning, self-perception, language proficiency and development, expectations, barriers to participation, predictors of achievement, program satisfaction, and student motivation.

### **Rationale for Studying Abroad**

Thinking globally and creating graduates who promote and embrace cultural diversity are fostered through study abroad experiences. Thus, study abroad is embraced by university administrators as it helps to fulfill the mission of an institution of higher learning. Study abroad, as Hopkins (1999) writes, "provide[s] students with a healthy dose of experiential learning. Immersing oneself in another culture provides new opportunities for learning-by-doing, virtually twenty-four hours a day" (p. 36). The concept of experiential learning is another goal of today's typical academic institution; it is a worthy and noble aim and is clearly an entrenched component and potential outcome of student study abroad participation. This natural overlap of positive benefits derived through experiential learning makes studying abroad that much more appealing.

Americans studying abroad in more significant numbers will enable other cultures to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the United States. Allen E. Goodman is the current President and Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of International Education (IIE), the leading not-for-profit educational and cultural exchange organization in the United States. Mr. Goodman summarizes the importance of international study in today's global climate with "the lasting ties that international students make while studying here and American students make while studying abroad are important to our country in times of conflict as well as in times of peace" ("International Education," 2001, para. 4).

It is clear by the impetus that American colleges and universities are placing on study abroad that increased growth in participation will remain a focal point in higher education. The University of Virginia has a goal of enrolling fully 80% of all of its students in a study abroad program by the year 2020 (Hindman, 2003). According to University of Texas Provost and Executive Vice President Sheldon Ekland-Olsen, his university has set a goal to double its study abroad enrollment within the next five years (Athavaley, 2003).

Students might study abroad for a variety of reasons including academic advancement, personal growth, improved socialization, and a heightened perspective of the world. Specific reasons that have been identified by researchers for students to study abroad include improving foreign language proficiency, acquiring cultural knowledge, a desire to travel, a new critical perspective on the United States, and enhanced social competence in unfamiliar settings (Talbur & Stewart, 1999). Kitsantas (2004) concludes that study abroad programs enhance both the global understanding and cross-cultural skills of participants.

Another rationale given to encourage studying abroad is the opportunity for students to work while abroad and fulfill internship requirements. Many academic majors require students to gain a practical cooperative work or internship experience related to their discipline, and the chance to gain this experience in

another culture is an ideal opportunity. A few benefits of an international internship include (a) gaining cross cultural exposure, (b) developing foreign language competency, (c) enhancing job placement chances with multinational/international companies or certain governmental agencies, (d) establishing future job contacts, and (e) developing the skills to adapt to a variety of challenging environments (Peterson's Study Abroad, 2005).

Kauffmann et. al (1992) identify a significant outcome of the study abroad experience that is commonly associated with students who study for a period of time in another country. The authors write, "The study abroad experience releases the students from their present peer group and frees them to recompose their criteria for their friendships. It can free them to ask new questions, try new interests, and form new conceptions of life" (p. 106). The idea of students being able to develop a new outlook and reconsider their interpersonal relationships, decisions, and values as a result of studying abroad is considered a major benefit of such an experience.

In his article on preparing engaged citizens and the importance of experiential education, Peterson (2002) identifies a number of positive outcomes from studying abroad due to its transformative power. These outcomes assume that both students and faculty/staff alike will attribute such things as self-reliance, increased flexibility, emotional maturity, critical thinking skills, empathy, reduced ethnocentrism, heightened social concern, and values clarification to the study abroad experience. Vadino (2005) expands on the student benefits of such experiential learning. Upon leading a diverse group of students on a summer study abroad program in Costa Rica, she comments, "This focused experiential education...incorporated subjects such as race, class, and gender. Moreover, it instigated students to take a critical view of the world they live in" (p. 69).

Yet another rationale supporting the study abroad concept is the new viewpoint with which the returning student will view the United States. American students who have spent time studying and living in another country will have a different outlook regarding the United States upon their return. Students will likely gain a better understanding of the United States, its way of life, and overall role in international affairs as well as how others view the U.S. and its role in the world (IIE Passport, 2005). This kind of perspective on one's own country is not achieved if one spends an entire educational career within the home country.

Lindsey (2005) conducted qualitative research on social work students to examine the impact of study abroad on their education. In focusing on values development, she identified six themes reported by the study abroad students: (a) opening the mind to new ways of thinking; (b) awareness and insight of one's own values and beliefs; (c) challenges to societal values and beliefs; (d) appreciation of difference, cultural sensitivity, and anti-discriminatory practice; (e) social justice; and (f) professional identity development. Highlighting the shortage of research on male students, it should be noted that her study surveyed 29 students, 27 of whom were female and only 2 were male.

## **Cultural Adjustment**

A major benefit to studying abroad is the opportunity to live, study, and possibly work within a completely new culture. The idea of living in an environment with a new set of cultural norms and mores can be very appealing to university students seeking out a new challenge. As author Craig Storti (1990) writes, when people move abroad, they are really adjusting to new behaviors rather than to a new culture. Storti explains,

Culture, a system of beliefs and values shared by a particular group of people, is an abstraction which can be appreciated intellectually, but it is behavior, the principal manifestation and most significant consequence of culture, that we actually experience. To put it another way: it is culture as encountered in behavior that we must learn to live with. (p. 14)

Piet-Pelon and Hornby (1992) suggest that there are a number of stages that individuals go through in adapting to new cultural surroundings. The first is the Honeymoon stage when everything is new and exciting about the new surroundings. Next is the Anxiety stage when the individual begins to realize many differences in the new culture and is unable to change or do anything about them. The third stage is the Rejection stage when the newcomer tries to project all of their problems and fears on the nearest scapegoat, the new culture. The fourth stage is that of Regression when the individual attempts to "hide out" from new surroundings and seek out safe areas where English is spoken or other familiar surroundings are near. The final stage of culture shock is Adjustment. In this final stage, the individual has begun to more fully understand and trust the new surroundings, thus being able to adjust and adapt to the culture and people.



Hess (1997) writes extensively about the importance of students establishing intercultural competence and understanding other cultures in order to maximize success in studying abroad. Hess notes a number of preferred traits that his experiences have shown to be most important: a curious, inquisitive person; a trusting rather than suspicious person; someone who is brave and secure; a relaxed individual rather than one who is impatient; a learner who is friendly and humble; and a person who is compassionate or empathetic with a sense of humor. These traits are representative of those needed for individuals to best understand new cultures and, therefore, succeed at studying abroad.

Another element of cultural adjustment is the ability and opportunity to more fully and completely see ourselves. The opportunity to have this new view is a worthy component of any educational experience, further demonstrating the value of studying abroad within the realm of higher education. Living and studying in another country affords students the chance to see themselves in a radically new light. Kohls (1996) writes,

“By lowering our defenses and viewing ourselves through the eyes of people from other cultures...we can get a strikingly refreshing view of ourselves” (p. 41).

Kohls (1996) expands on the process of examining culture by writing that a new awareness of one’s own cultural self is a “source of strength because it reinforces my real worth rather than an ethnocentric view of reality” (p. 42). As he simply states, knowing ourselves better is to grow. This new cultural understanding and appreciation is a critical part of the growing, learning, maturing, and educational process.

Dolby (2004) conducted qualitative research on American students who studied abroad in Australia to better understand how these students negotiated their “American” identity. She found that students return from studying abroad with a new understanding of America. They return with a realization that there is a difference between “America” (representing pop culture, movies, entertainment, capitalism, etc.) and the United States as a global citizen with its domestic and foreign policies, political issues, etc. These new found perspectives will have implications for future discussions between U.S. citizens regarding democracy, citizenship, and the public good. Further highlighting the shortage of research on male students, it should be noted that her study surveyed 26 students, 20 of whom were female and 6 were male.

### **Potential Obstacles to Studying Abroad**

In a survey of 500 four-year college bound high school seniors carried out by the Art and Science Group through a national American Council of Education survey, Hayward and Siaya (2001) report the following as the most commonly noted reasons from those students who did not want to study abroad: 34% stated they had no interest or did not want to leave the United States, 21% stated they did not know, 11% were worried about cost, 8% indicated a distraction from career goals, 6% felt they would not be able to pursue their major, 5% never thought about it, and 5% stated that studying abroad takes too much time from academic goals. In reviewing the reasons stated as obstacles for studying abroad, many of the reasons given on the list can be overcome simply through increased awareness and a better understanding of the process to go abroad.

Martin and Rohrlich (1991) identify 13 areas of concern that students might encounter prior to studying or traveling abroad. These 13 areas include housing, coursework, food, climate, language, health, sufficient money, homesickness, interaction with new people, unfamiliar currency, adjustment to new customs, extracurricular travel while abroad, and local transportation. Their research concludes that student gender is critical in dealing with these areas of concern, and that it must be incorporated into future research and in implementing pre-departure orientation programs. They assert that “women were more realistic about their ability to deal with the intercultural experience than were men” (p. 44). These facts suggest the psychological barriers for studying abroad differ between males and females, and that males may not be as prepared to deal with the numerous uncertainties potentially associated with studying abroad.

Lewis and Niesenbaum (2005) write that students choose to stay in the United States for a variety of reasons including financial constraints, the potential for violent acts against Americans (especially in a post-September 11 world), and the perception that studying abroad will not fit within their academic program or major. This last concern is heightened if a student is in an inflexible or hierarchical program such as science or health. Their solution to such obstacles is through an emphasis on short-term study abroad options; if the long-term or yearlong option seems too daunting, a short-term option may be the best choice and still achieve

many of the intended goals of studying abroad. Their research further reinforces that studying abroad (even for a short-term) helps students question assumptions, gather/interpret data, and better understand their role in a global society.

While it is important to have the short-term study abroad option, critics contend that these experiences simply do not provide the depth and impact that a longer experience (studying abroad for a semester or greater) yields. The American Council on Education (2000) notes that the number of students studying abroad for a semester or longer has dropped from 18% to 10% from 1985-1997.

Yet another potential obstacle to studying abroad (or traveling/living abroad for an extended period) is the process of returning home upon completion. Storti (1997) writes that the meaning of "home" is really comprised of three key elements: familiar places, familiar people, and routines and predictable patterns of interaction. The process of returning home and trying to re-acclimate to an old system that the student has been out of for an extended period may be a frightening proposition. Storti asserts these three key ingredients of "home" provide individuals with a sense of security, understanding, trust, safety, and belonging. This fear of leaving a comfort zone and then having to return and re-adjust may prove to be a barrier for some potential students contemplating a study abroad option.

Further potential obstacles to studying abroad are more a function of higher education structures and organization rather than the perceptions or interests of individual students. Cummings (2001) notes that four distinctive characteristics are particular to the field of international education and, therefore, makes this field unlike more traditional fields. First, there is a lack of clarity on the field's guiding theme (i.e., is this field about internationalization, transnationalization, or globalization?). Second, only 8% of U.S. college students are enrolled in foreign languages. Next, an imbalance in global emphasis exists as there is major interest in areas such as Western Europe and Latin America, but very little emphasis on the Middle East and Africa. Finally, research on international education tends to be sporadic, non-cumulative, and is generally carried out by national organizations acting as advocates. In addition to these four characteristics, Cummings affirms that responsibility for international education at many institutions is generally in the hands of a language or humanities faculty member (with no clear directive from administration). All of these issues create an environment whereby international education does not receive the appropriate attention or focus necessary to flourish on many college campuses.

### **External Forces Encouraging Study Abroad**

In highlighting the importance of study abroad to the future of higher education and the continuing effects of globalization, McCabe (2001) writes,

It has become obvious to most educators that globalization and internationalization will take on increased significance in the next millennium, as technology, communications, and transportation serve as the mechanisms for potential social, political, and/or economic collisions between people of the world. Given the convergence of modernization between countries, as educators, we must consider the ramifications of such a pattern in terms of how to best prepare our students for the processes of both globalization and internationalization. (p. 141)

As philosophies such as those proposed by New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas L. Friedman in his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, continue to gain popularity and justification, institutions of higher learning will need to continue preparing students with a global mindset. Friedman proposes that globalization is not simply some passing trend, but rather has become the international system that has supplanted the Cold War system. Globalization represents an interconnected system that integrates technology, capital, and information across national borders and creates a single global market (Friedman, 1999).

In his latest book, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, Friedman (2005) suggests the globalization movement first focused on countries globalizing, followed by companies globalizing, and now the focus is on individuals who are able to compete globally. Friedman's argument is that the world has gotten so small that it has now become flat. This shrinking of the world, he argues, is primarily due to advancements in technology, communications, software, fiber optics, and the Internet. Thus, for university students who represent tomorrow's leaders, experiences such as studying abroad will continue to enhance a better understanding of this new system and globalization.

The focus on study abroad has reached the highest levels within the American government. U.S. President Bill Clinton issued an executive memorandum in 2000 directing federal agencies to offer scholarships and other programs promoting study abroad ("Education Secretary Promotes," 2000). The memoran-

dum specifically called on the federal government to help colleges increase the number and diversity of those students who study abroad (Hardi, 2000).

Richard W. Riley, the U.S. Secretary of Education during the Clinton Administration, made foreign exchange a top priority during his tenure. According to Riley,

Many more American college students need to see the world with a new set of eyes. And the best way for them to see the world as it really is, is to study overseas....The United States has much to learn, as well as gain, by such an engagement with the world. ("Education Secretary Promotes," 2000, para. 3)

Riley also noted that American colleges and universities should adopt the goal set at the 1999 Group of 8 (G-8) summit where member nations pledged to double educational exchange opportunities over the next decade (Hardi, 2000).

In January 2006, United States Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings co-hosted the University Presidents Summit on International Education at the State Department. Presidents from over 120 U.S. colleges and universities attended the Summit intended to "engage leaders of U.S. higher education in a renewed partnership to strengthen international education, emphasizing its importance to the national interest" (U.S. Department of State, 2005, para. 1). Further, at the Summit, President George W. Bush announced a \$114 million National Security Language Initiative intended to strengthen foreign language education, enhance study abroad scholarships, expand the Fulbright program, establish teacher exchange programs, and create summer immersion programs (Field, 2006).

Encouragement from the U.S. Federal Government in support of education abroad is nothing new, however. The National Task Force report on undergraduate study recommended that 10% of North American college students should have a significant educational experience abroad prior to graduation. The United States Congress passed the National Security Education Act of 1991, seeking to facilitate study abroad and increase the support for such related areas as foreign language instruction (Twombly, 1995). This Act tripled federal spending on undergraduate study abroad and provided more money for graduate research supporting international, area studies, and foreign language programs (Pickert, 1992).

Further evidence of governmental support necessary for study abroad is stated by two former governors, John Engler of Michigan and James Hunt of North Carolina. Engler and Hunt (2004) argue that globalization is a fact not an ideology, and in a world with emerging threats such as terrorism, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and environmental issues, increased knowledge of various regions, cultures, and languages will be critical. Further, as the global marketplace continues to develop and countries become increasingly dependent upon one another for business, the study of other countries and cultures will help America's young adults as they compete in the future global marketplace. As they aptly state, while writing about study abroad, "In an interconnected world, understanding other nations and regions is a cornerstone of democratic citizenship. This aspect of education deserves our swift and lasting attention" (p. 199).

The late United States Senator Paul Simon and former Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, served as honorary co-chairs of the Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad commissioned by NAFSA. The NAFSA association's acronym derived from its original name in 1948 of National Association of Foreign Student Advisers. The abbreviation has since been dropped and the organization is simply known as NAFSA: Association of International Educators. NAFSA is a leading association in the field of international education with nearly 9,000 members at 3,500 institutions in 94 countries. NAFSA focuses on creating and disseminating knowledge regarding international education and works to influence public policy in this area (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2005a).

In its recent report, titled *Securing America's Future: Global Education for a Global Age*, the NAFSA Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad urges the United States Congress to make study abroad more of a reality for America's college students. The report also focuses on the role and importance of studying abroad in today's political, economic, and socio-cultural international framework. The report states,

The challenges of the new millennium are unquestionably global in nature. This reality imposes a new and urgent demand on Americans, one this country has been all too quick to ignore: international knowledge and skills are imperative for the future security and competitiveness of the United States. The rhetoric of a decade attests to the widespread recognition of this fundamental truth, yet concrete steps to fulfill this need have been few. Strong leadership and a coherent policy are still lacking, and the cost of inaction grows ever greater.

To address this serious deficit in global competence, the report of NAFSA's Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad proposes a national effort to promote study abroad. We strongly believe that the events of September 11, 2001, constituted a wake-up call – a warning that America's ignorance of the world is now a national liability. Americans in vastly greater numbers must devote a substantive portion of their education to gaining an understanding of other countries, regions, languages, and cultures, through direct personal experience. (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003, p. iv)

Individual colleges and universities are establishing specific programs to encourage their students to study abroad. The University of Denver initiated a new program in 2003 known as the Cherrington Global Scholars. Any eligible students (junior or senior status with a 3.0 GPA) can study abroad for a quarter. The Cherrington Global Scholars program will subsidize any additional study abroad program costs that are above the rate the student would pay on campus (including transportation). This program, therefore, serves to effectively equalize the financial burden existing between studying abroad and staying at the home campus (University of Denver, 2005).

Other universities are likewise encouraging their students to study abroad. Harvard University completed a comprehensive curricular review in 2004. One area the university noted that it must improve is in encouraging its students to gain an international experience. The recommendation encouraged "all Harvard College students pursue a significant international experience during their time in the College, and that completion of such an experience be noted on the transcript" (Harvard University, 2004, p. 40). It further recommended the allocation of financial support to make these experiences a reality. This recommendation within the curricular review at Harvard is significant. Bartlett (2004) notes this is the first review of the curriculum at Harvard since 1978, and other universities tend to look at what elite colleges such as Harvard are implementing. Given the fact Harvard is now placing such emphasis on study abroad may lead more colleges and universities to continue stressing such experiential learning.

It is not uncommon for American colleges and universities to list statements similar to "creating an atmosphere encouraging an open dialogue," "learning in diverse settings," "better understanding of new cultures," and "learning experientially" as explicit objectives and goals for its students. As stated on its homepage, part of the Mission Statement for the University of North Dakota is as follows:

The University encourages students to make informed choices, to communicate effectively, to be intellectually curious and creative, to commit themselves to lifelong learning and the service of others, and to share responsibility both for their own communities and for the world. The University promotes cultural diversity among its students, staff and faculty. (University of North Dakota, 2004, para. 2)

The University of Minnesota stresses similar ideals that fit appropriately with the study abroad concept by including the following in its Mission Statement:

In all of its activities, the University strives to sustain an open exchange of ideas in an environment that embodies the values of academic freedom, responsibility, integrity, and cooperation; [that] provides an atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance; [that] assists individuals, institutions, and communities in responding to a continuously changing world; [that] is conscious of and responsive to the needs of the many communities it is committed to serving; [that] creates and supports partnerships within the University, with other educational systems and institutions, and with communities to achieve common goals; and [that] inspires, sets high expectations for, and empowers the individuals within its community. (University of Minnesota, 1994, para. 3)

Mission statements akin to these two are fairly typical at most institutions of higher learning. Whether a university is public or private, large or small, rural or urban, reference to an appreciation and tolerance for diversity and a better understanding of the global framework can nearly always be found in a university's mission or purpose statement. Given today's delicate global framework, it is only right that such emphasis and consideration be included in the most fundamental of academic settings.

Another external force encouraging American students to study abroad is employers willing to potentially hire them for their unique skill sets. Hoffa (1998) writes that internationalized careers are available in such varying career paths as banking, law, communications, engineering, science, government, higher education, and volunteerism. Employers are generally supportive and interested in hiring new employees who have a broad, global perspective of the world around them. Hoffa notes that returning students who have studied abroad make for good applicants for the working world due to their enhanced personal qualities of personal maturity, risk-taking nature, imagination, adaptability, grit, self-confidence, and awareness of the greater systems around the world beyond simply those in the United States. These qualities are all vital personal qualities for any new employee wanting to productively contribute to an organization.

## **Study Abroad Growth Potential**

Given the dramatic increases in study abroad participation and significant overall growth in interest by both students and university personnel, the 143,590 study abroad participants in 1999-2000 represented less than 1% of the total post-secondary student population in the United States (Green, 2002). Given that less than 1% of the 14 million students enrolled in U.S. colleges, universities, technical schools, and military academies study abroad (Jenkins & Skelly, 2004), the potential for growth within the 99% of the remaining student population seems likely. According to the attitudes of college-age students, there appears to be much room for more growth. A poll of 500 college bound high school seniors by Hayward and Siaya in 2001 indicated that 48% wanted to study abroad and 85% stated that they planned to participate in international courses or programs (Green, 2002).

As Jenkins and Skelly (2004) note, the reality is that studying abroad in today's world remains a marginal activity within U.S. institutions of higher education as only a handful of the total student population participates. Herrin (2004) squarely puts the responsibility for this growth on direct action required by professional associations and accrediting bodies. Additionally, buy-in and support will be needed by campus decision makers such as deans, provosts, department chairs, and presidents.

As more financial assistance and support from a wider variety of sources is made available, the number of students studying abroad has the potential to increase. Scholarships such as the Cherrington program at the University of Denver or Georgia Tech's new program of non-resident students paying in-state tuition for study abroad and all participating students being exempted from fees (Bowman & Jennings, 2005) are enticing opportunities for students. The NAFSA Strategic Task Force, referenced earlier, urged Congress to provide \$3.5 billion annually for a half million study abroad fellowships (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003). Bowman and Jennings note that corporations are far more likely to support "funding college students gaining global competence than in funding research on the correlates of democracy in Central America" (p. 78). This exemplifies the willingness of private companies to fund experiential educational endeavors that focus on a broadening of university students' international awareness and exposure.

Students undoubtedly have the interest and desire to participate in international activities such as study abroad, yet when the time arrives to act, very few of them (especially males) actually follow through. This disparity combined with the increasing importance placed on study abroad by external university constituents (the federal government, employers, taxpayers, etc.) creates a unique opportunity for exploring ways to increase overall study abroad participation. An understanding of perceived student barriers, their motivations, perceived benefits, and rationale for studying abroad will help to bridge this disparity. Moreover, a better understanding of both the commonalities and differences in how the two genders view studying abroad will help in further closing the gender gap currently existing in study abroad enrollments.

## **Gender in Study Abroad Research**

Based on the gender gap among American college students studying abroad, it is clear that gender is a key element and needs continued, focused attention in study abroad research. Couper (2001) identified the importance of gender in researching the impact that studying abroad has on personal growth, career consolidation, and adaptation of new cultures. She states, "Study abroad research must take into account culture-oriented restrictions, behavior, and environments that are clearly different for males and females" (p. 169).

Hoffa and Pearson (1997) reflect on the gender gap by offering some explanations and assuming the imbalance will eventually disappear over time. They offer three primary explanations for the historical study abroad gender imbalance: (a) Study abroad participants have primarily come from female-dominated majors such as languages and the liberal arts; (b) cultural values in the United States encourage men to pursue more "serious" curricular matters while in college; and (c) women are expected to excel in social relations and those can be enhanced by studying abroad. The authors note,

Given the prevalence of such sexism, and the notion that a study abroad experience is somehow frivolous, we can see why more women than men have traditionally studied abroad. But because these assumptions are changing, this gender imbalance may soon even out. (p. 153)

Hoffa and Pearson's prediction for the disappearance of the gender imbalance was made nearly a decade ago, and the proportion of males to females studying abroad has remained completely unchanged. The problem of the gender gap is simply not going away.

Other comprehensive research focused on gender and study abroad has been limited, but some research has been conducted to compare differences in males and females while abroad. Hashim and Zhil-

iang (2003) researched the perception of stressors in students studying abroad in China. The participants were freshmen and both males and females reported similar stress levels due to daily strains as they studied in China. The top several stressors for both males and females were conflicts with host-parents, conflicts with roommates, difficulties with the Chinese language, and messy living conditions. Hashim and Zhiliang note, "Considering the overall results, the research indicated only marginal differences between males and females in the type of events perceived as stressful" (p. 224).

Thomlison (1991) is one of the few researchers who has done a comprehensive study examining the cross-cultural experiences between genders. He noted that "more research on gender is needed to isolate differences in how a study-abroad experience affects attitudes, beliefs, interests, awareness levels, [and] values" (p. 42).

## CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to develop and test an instrument (Appendix A) that measured the reactions of university students who participated in a study abroad experience during the fall 2003 semester or quarter. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the motivating factors that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
2. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
3. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad?
4. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the promotional activities that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
5. Is there a significant difference between males and females in how they viewed the perceived benefits of studying abroad?
6. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program?
7. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over?

This chapter contains a description of the instrument, a description of the sample, and the methods used to collect and analyze the data. The study was approved by the University of North Dakota's Institutional Review Board (project number IRB 200404 292).

College students from a variety of universities throughout the United States who studied abroad during fall 2003 were surveyed. Student respondents represented a variety of universities (public and private, large and small, rural and urban) as well as a range of majors and academic standings (first-year students through seniors). The focus was to obtain a representative sample of American college students. Additionally, attempts were made to ensure there was a fair and proportionate cross-section of both males and females.

### **Instrument**

The instrument for this study focused on identifying motivating factors leading students to study abroad as well as those factors students deemed as potential barriers for those who do not study abroad. Additionally, the instrument encouraged respondents to reflect on their study abroad experience and the benefits they attributed to participation in such activity. The instrument also assessed the student's perception of academic rigor in studying abroad as well as overall satisfaction with the experience.

The instrument consisted of an electronically delivered survey questionnaire with a total of 21 questions. Eight questions centered on demographic data, another eight questions focused on respondents' reflection on their study abroad experience, and five questions related to motivational factors responsible for leading the participants to study abroad. Most of the questions relating to the study abroad experience required consideration of multiple choices and were based on a five-point likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." The actual web-based survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

This quantitative research was conducted through the use of a web-based survey distributed via email. Participants submitted their responses electronically and the results were automatically tabulated in a database. This system allowed for a tracking of the responses and enabled the greatest response rate possible. In gathering and analyzing these data, a better understanding of why college students decided to study abroad and a deeper understanding of their motivations were gained along with themes of how students perceived the benefits of studying abroad. This information can be used by study abroad professionals to more effectively market and promote studying abroad to a wider base of potential participants. A better understanding of student motivations will help in developing marketing materials along with establishing a marketing plan appealing to all students, regardless of gender.

From 2001 through 2004, the researcher was involved with the University of Minnesota's Curriculum Integration grant project partially funded by the Archibald Bush Foundation. The project, "Internationalizing the University of Minnesota: Integrating Study Abroad," involved all campuses of the University of Minnesota system (Twin Cities, Duluth, Morris, and Crookston). The researcher served as the coordinator and lead person at the Crookston campus since the project's inception. The collaboration of this project enabled the researcher to establish numerous relationships with study abroad personnel at other universities from throughout the United States proving beneficial in facilitating the collection of data from survey respondents.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity in a research project describes a survey instrument's ability to measure what the researcher is intending to measure. Instrument reliability refers to the ability of the survey to yield consistent responses over time, and can be proven through a test-retest method (Watson, 2004). A common approach to establishing validity is to compare results of one study with those of a similar study that has been conducted on the same topic. This study, however, represented new research that has not been previously conducted. A pilot study was conducted to establish both validity and reliability of the instrument.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted using the survey instrument to ensure data collection and data analysis procedures were appropriate. The pilot survey was distributed in March 2004 to eight students who had studied abroad during the fall 2003 semester (the population group of interest). Additionally, the survey was distributed to study abroad advisors at 20 different universities (Appendix B) to gather their feedback of the appropriateness of survey questions and topic selections. This was of particular value as these professionals work with study abroad participants on a day-to-day basis and offered specific feedback to ensure correct survey questions were included. The survey was further distributed to 10 individuals who had no interest or knowledge of studying abroad to ensure the online survey mechanism functioned properly and the language was easily understood.

Finally, the survey was distributed to 10 respondents in June 2004 who had studied abroad through the University of Minnesota, Crookston during the past year. This was the final trial run of the survey, as it was sent out approximately two weeks before the survey was distributed to the actual sample population. This time frame allowed respondents an adequate amount of time to read and respond to the survey and provide feedback. This final trial ensured the questions were appropriate, understandable, and that the electronic Internet-based response mechanism worked appropriately. All respondents were asked to report any difficulties in understanding or answering the questions or technical difficulties with the online survey instrument.

Comments from these individuals in the pilot study resulted in several changes made to the survey to ensure appropriateness and functionality for the larger survey population. For example, the original survey included the demographic questions at the very beginning of the survey. Feedback from individuals indicated they would be more comfortable answering questions about their GPA, gender, ethnicity, and age at the end of the survey rather than at the beginning. Another change was with the wording used in a couple of sections. For example, on the listing of potential barriers to studying abroad, one possible obstacle initially used was the fear of leaving a "comfort zone." Feedback indicated that this term was too vague and not specific enough. The survey possibility was ultimately changed to a fear of leaving family and friends. This wording is more specific and better represents the original intent of the question. Other useful suggestions centered on the order of the survey questions. In the original pilot study survey, the questions were in a very random order. However, feedback indicated that questions should be in more of a chronological order based on the processes students actually engaged in to study abroad. The questions were ultimately reorganized to rationally follow the steps a student would take in pursuing a study abroad experience. It is for this reason the early questions focus on those individuals and reasons why the respondent considered studying abroad,



and the final items include such questions as whether or not the respondent would repeat their experience given the chance to do it over.

### **Data Collection**

In 2003, the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board issued an exempt status to this survey. Confidentiality was assured to all institutions and individuals who participated. Additionally, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. A cover letter consent form accompanied the survey instrument explaining this information and was distributed electronically to the participants (Appendix C).

An email (Appendix D) was sent to the SECUSSA-L listserv group of NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The 9,000 international educators comprising the NAFSA association are organized into several sections based on member interest. SECUSSA is an acronym for the Section on United States Students Abroad, and is comprised of professionals who focus on U.S. students abroad as well as those who coordinate study abroad programs. The SECUSSA listserv is an open discussion group focusing on issues important to individuals who work with education abroad (Soneson & SECUSSA Team of NAFSA, 2005). The email message was sent in March 2004 to the SECUSSA listserv by Mr. Chip Peterson. Mr. Peterson is an experienced study abroad professional from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities who is a long time active member of SECUSSA and its listserv network. The message explained this gender gap research project and requested interested colleges and universities that had students studying abroad during the fall 2003 to contact the researcher. The group that responded then became the foundation of those universities that would participate and assist in soliciting student responses for the survey.

There were a total of 24 different universities that responded with interest to the listserv query. To satisfy the University of North Dakota's IRB policy, each of these 24 institutional representatives had to electronically complete a short response form (at the very end of the email listserv message in Appendix D) indicating their name, university, and willingness to assist in the data collection. These individuals all had the opportunity to review the survey instrument to provide their input prior to its dissemination. All institutional representatives agreed to distribute the electronic version of the survey via email to those students from their universities who fit the criteria (students who studied abroad during the fall 2003 semester or quarter). Institutional representatives at the 24 universities electronically distributed the email cover letter explaining the research project along with the URL link to the survey. The action of the student clicking on the link and completing the survey was tantamount to their acknowledgment of the cover letter consent form and agreement with participating in the research study. This method was approved by the UND Institutional Review Board and deemed equivalent to electronic consent.

The survey was sent to study abroad coordinators at 7 of the 24 universities in June 2004 via email (Appendix E). These seven universities had smaller overall numbers of study abroad participants and effectively served as the first phase of the data collection, while ensuring all technical issues worked with the survey. Dr. David DeMuth, professor of Physics and Mathematics at the University of Minnesota, Crookston, developed the online survey software and monitored the initial wave of survey responses returned from the seven institutions. The electronic survey method proved effective, and a larger, second phase of the survey was sent in July 2004 to the remaining study abroad personnel from the other 17 institutions that had expressed interest in participating.

A follow-up note was sent approximately two weeks after the initial email to all 24 universities encouraging them to follow up with their students and work toward a greater participant response rate. Ultimately, student responses from only 14 of the original 24 universities that showed interest in the study actually responded. These 14 universities were primarily located in the Northeast and Midwest portions of the United States. The remaining 10 institutions of the original 24 simply elected not to follow through or respond with participation.

### **Treatment of the Data**

Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to analyze the data to determine (a) if there was a relationship between the genders regarding the motivational factors (both internal and external) leading students to pursue studying abroad, (b) if there was a relationship between the genders regarding the factors perceived as barriers discouraging a college student from potentially studying abroad, (c) if there was a relationship between the genders regarding the benefits they perceived as an ensuing result of studying abroad, (d) if there was a relationship between the genders regarding their views on the academic rigors of studying abroad, and (e) if there was a relationship between the genders regarding their likelihood of study-

ing abroad again given the chance to do so. SAS (originally known as Statistical Analysis System) 9.1 was used for generating frequencies, descriptive statistics, and analyses of procedures.

To test research question number one, "Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the motivating factors that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females in the motivating factors influencing them to pursue a study abroad experience. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females in the motivating factors influencing them to pursue a study abroad experience. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the motivating factors for each gender.

To test research question number two, "Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the influential people for each gender.

To test research question number three, "Is there a significant difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the potential obstacles to studying abroad for each gender.

To test research question number four, "Is there a significant difference between males and females in the promotional activities that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females in the promotional activities influencing them to pursue a study abroad experience. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females in the promotional activities influencing them to pursue a study abroad experience. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the influential promotional activities for each gender.

To test research question number five, "Is there a significant difference between males and females in how they viewed the perceived benefits of studying abroad?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females regarding perceived benefits of studying abroad. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females regarding perceived benefits of studying abroad. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the perceived benefits of studying abroad for each gender.

To test research question number six, "Is there a significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the perception of academic rigor for each gender.

To test research question number seven, "Is there a significant difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over?," the null hypothesis was as follows: There is no difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over. The alternate hypothesis was as follows: There is a significant difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the likelihood of repeating the study abroad experience for each gender.

In the next chapter, demographic data collected through this research can be found. Tests of statistical significance for each of the seven research questions are also presented along with further data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to develop and test an instrument (Appendix A) that measured the reactions of university students who participated in a study abroad experience during the fall 2003 semester or quarter. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the motivating factors that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
2. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
3. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad?
4. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the promotional activities that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
5. Is there a significant difference between males and females in how they viewed the perceived benefits of studying abroad?
6. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program?
7. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over?

This chapter includes a description of the demographic characteristics of the subjects along with subsequent analysis to answer the research questions.

## Demographic Characteristics of the Subjects

A total of 179 students representing 14 different colleges and universities throughout the United States participated in the study. Table 1 illustrates the gender, ethnicity, academic major, and study abroad location of the respondents.

According to national data compiled by the Institute of International Education, 66% of all American students who studied abroad in 2003-04 were female (Institute of International Education, 2005a). Additionally, based on national data, of all American students abroad in 2003-04, 84% were Caucasians (Institute of International Education, 2005c). Of all American students who studied abroad in 2003-04, 23% were Social Science majors and 18% were Business/Management majors (Institute of International Education, 2005a). According to national figures, of all American students who studied abroad in 2003-04, 61% studied in Europe, 8% studied in Australia/New Zealand, and 7% studied in Asia (Institute of International Education, 2005b). Therefore, based on gender, ethnicity, major field of study, and geographic location of study, Table 1 illustrates that respondents in this survey were fairly similar to the national composite data of all American students who studied abroad in 2003-04.

**Table 1. Demographic Data on Gender, Ethnicity, Academic Major, and Location of Study Abroad.**

Characteristics		n	%
Gender			
	Female	128	73.1
	Male	47	26.9
Ethnicity			
	Caucasian	151	89.9
	African-American	5	3.0
	Asian-American	5	3.0
	Multi-Racial	4	2.4
	Hispanic-American	3	1.8
Academic Major			
	Social Sciences	54	30.7
	Business/Management	40	22.7
	Foreign Languages	18	10.2
	Humanities	17	9.7
	Education	5	2.8
	Fine/Applied Arts	5	2.8
	Physical Science	4	2.3
	Math/Computer Science	3	1.7
	Health Sciences	2	1.1
	Other	25	14.2
Location of Study Abroad			
	Europe	123	69.5
	Australia/New Zealand	19	10.7
	Latin America	14	7.9
	Asia	10	5.7
	Africa	3	1.7
	Multiple Regions	3	1.7
	North America	2	1.1
	Middle East	1	.6
	Other	2	1.1

Table 2 illustrates the age and grade point average of the survey respondents. The overwhelming majority of respondents were traditional-age college students, and this closely aligns with national figures. Traditional-age students are those from 18-23 years of age (Justice & Dornan, 2001). Non-traditional students typically have responsibilities with jobs, families, children, and other activities that make studying abroad difficult. Only 1.7% of respondents were 24 or older. Approximately 90% of the survey respondents indicated a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher. This correlates with the theory that those students studying abroad tend to be better students and more academically prepared. They tend to have greater initiative and can deal with the realities of being overseas for a semester while still maintaining a solid academic standing.

**Table 2. Demographic Data on Age and Grade Point Average.**

Characteristic		n	%
Age			
	Under 18	1	.6
	18-19	18	10.3
	20-21	128	73.1
	22-23	25	14.3
	24 or older	3	1.7
Grade Point Average			
	3.51-4.0	82	46.3
	3.0-3.5	79	44.6
	2.51-2.99	12	6.8
	2.0-2.5	2	1.1
	Below 2.0	2	1.1

The respondents primarily represented a handful of geographic regions of the United States. The regions used in the survey are based on state groupings, and correspond with the regions used for organizational and data purposes by NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Table 3 illustrates the responses from respondents to the question, “What region did you grow up in prior to college?” There is relatively little representation from the Southeastern, Southwestern, or Western parts of the United States in this study as 83% of the respondents grew up in 1 of only 15 of the American states. These states are predominantly in the Northeast or Midwest.

**Table 3. Demographic Data on Home Region.**

Geographic Region	n	%
ND, SD, MN, IA, MO	62	35.2
NY, NJ	32	18.2
WI, IL, MI	26	14.8
PA, WV, VA, DE, MD, DC	26	14.8
CA, NV, HI	7	4.0
AK, WA, OR, ID	6	3.4
VT, NH, ME, RI, MA, CT	6	3.4
TN, MS, AL, GA, FL, SC, NC, PR, VI	6	3.4
IN, OH, KY	3	1.7
MT, WY, UT, AZ, CO, NM, NE, KS	2	1.1

Concluding demographic data are presented in Table 4. These data identify the type of institution respondents attended and whether respondents had ever studied abroad prior to fall 2003 (the focus of this research).

**Table 4. Demographic Data on Type of Institution and Prior Study Abroad Experience.**

Characteristic	n	%
Type of Institution		
Private	103	58.5
Public	73	41.5
Prior Study Abroad Experience		
No	133	75.6
Yes	43	24.4

### Research Question Number One

Research question number one asked if there was a difference between males and females regarding those motivational factors that influenced them to study abroad. This was tested using the SAS procedures for independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 6, which included six motivational factors that each respondent considered based on a five-point likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

The t-test probabilities of these motivational factors are all above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ . Differences were tested and resulted in chi-square probabilities that are also representative of a probability that their similarities in response were correlated and not due to chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis for all motivational factors is accepted that there are no significant differences between males and females regarding those motivational factors that influenced them to study abroad.

**Table 5. t-Values for the Six Motivational Factors Influencing Respondents to Study Abroad.**

Motivational Factor	Df	t-value	Probability
Academic Fit of Study Abroad Program	173	.27	.7874
Geographic Location of Study Abroad	173	-.97	.3327
Affordability of Study Abroad Program	173	-.09	.9277
Career Advancement	65.3	1.65	.1037
Exploration of Other Cultures	68.5	1.12	.2656
Boredom w/ Current Situation	173	.02	.9863

### Research Question Number Two

Research question number two asked if there was a difference between males and females regarding those people who positively influenced them to study abroad. This was tested using the SAS procedures for independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 7, which included seven possible influential individuals who each respondent considered based on a five-point likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

The t-test probabilities of these motivational people influencing respondents to study abroad are all above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ , except for the Parents and Other Relatives categories. Therefore, except for the parental and other relative factors, the null hypothesis for all influential people is accepted that there are no differences between males and females regarding those individuals who were influential in the decision to study abroad. The t-tests of Parents (2.12,  $p=.0359$ ) and Other Relatives (2.36,  $p=.0196$ ) indicate the null hypothesis must be rejected for those individuals' influence. Therefore, there is a difference between males and females regarding their thoughts on the perceived influence of Parents and Other Relatives on their decision to study abroad.

**Table 6. t-Values for the Seven Motivational People Influencing Respondents to Study Abroad.**

Persons of Influence	Df	t-Value	Probability
Faculty Member In Area of Study	173	-.44	.6591
Faculty Out of Area of Study	173	1.02	.3069
Study Abroad Advisor	173	-.44	.6616
Parents	173	2.12	.0359
Siblings	173	1.31	.1927
Friends	173	.23	.8196
Other Relatives (cousins, etc.)	173	2.36	.0196

### Research Question Number Three

Research question number three asked if there was a difference between males and females in factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad. This was tested using the SAS procedures for independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 11, which included six possible factors viewed as obstacles to studying abroad that each respondent considered based on a five-point likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

**Table 7. t-Values for the Six Perceived Potential Barriers/Obstacles to Studying Abroad.**

Potential Barrier/Obstacle	Df	t-Value	Probability
Involvement with Activities	173	1.13	.2605
Involvement in Fraternity/Sorority	173	.07	.9438
Conflict with Job/Internship Opportunity	173	2.23	.0273
Affordability/Cost of Studying Abroad	173	3.01	.0030
Delay in Graduation	173	1.03	.3024
Fear of Leaving Family/Friends	173	1.67	.0975

The t-test probabilities of these potential barriers/obstacles to studying abroad are all above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ , except for the Conflict with Job/Internship barrier and the Affordability/Cost barrier. Therefore, except for Job/Internship Conflict barrier and the Cost/Affordability barrier, the null hypothesis for all potential barriers is accepted that there are no differences between males and females regarding those potential barriers to studying abroad. The t-tests of Job/Internship Conflict (2.23,  $p=.0273$ ) and Cost/Affordability (3.01,  $p=.003$ ) indicate the null hypothesis must be rejected for those perceived potential barriers. Therefore, there is a difference between males and females regarding their thoughts on the perceived barriers to studying abroad regarding Job/Internship Conflicts and Affordability/Cost.

### Research Question Number Four

Research question number four asked if there was a difference in promotional activities influencing males and females to pursue a study abroad experience. This was tested using the SAS procedures for independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 8, which included five possible promotional activities that each respondent considered based on a five-point likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

**Table 8. t-Values for the Five Promotional Activities Influencing Respondents to Study Abroad.**

Promotional Activity	Df	t-Value	Probability
Study Abroad Office	173	.57	.5688
University Internet Resources	173	.79	.4294
Study Abroad Program Website	173	.68	.4962
Study Abroad Fair on Campus	173	-.52	.6039
Non-Campus Web Resources	173	-1.28	.2020

The t-test probabilities of these motivational factors are all above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ . Differences were tested and resulted in chi-square probabilities that are also representative of a probability that their similarities in response were correlated and not due to chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis for all promotional activities is accepted that there are no differences between males and females regarding those promotional activities that influenced them to study abroad.



### Research Question Number Five

Research question number five asked if there was a difference between males and females in how they view the perceived benefits of studying abroad. This was tested using the SAS procedures for independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 10, which included nine possible benefits that each respondent considered based on a five-point likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

**Table 9. t-Values for the Nine Potential Benefits of Studying Abroad.**

Benefits to Studying Abroad	Df	t-Value	Probability
Enhanced Critical Thinking	173	1.11	.2691
Career Opportunities	64.9	.84	.4050
Delayed Graduation	62.9	-2.1	.0398
Learn a New Language	173	.03	.9753
Increased Interest in World Events	173	-.23	.8151
Ability to Adapt to New Situations	173	.18	.8605
Re-Think Career Goals	173	-1.11	.2671
Inspired to Study Abroad Again	173	-.06	.9499
Motivated to Travel/Work Abroad	173	.6	.5471

The t-test probabilities of these motivational factors are all above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ , except for the Delayed Graduation factor. Differences were tested and resulted in chi-square probabilities that are also representative of a probability that their similarities in response were correlated and not due to chance (except for the delayed graduation factor). Therefore, except for Delayed Graduation, the null hypothesis for all potential benefits is accepted that there are no differences between males and females regarding those potential benefits to studying abroad. The t-test of Delayed Graduation ( $-2.1$ ,  $p=.0398$ ) indicates the null hypothesis must be rejected for this factor. Therefore, there is a difference between males and females regarding their thoughts on the impact that studying abroad has on potentially delaying graduation.

### Research Question Number Six

Research question number six asked if there was a difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor between a study abroad program and their home university curriculum. This was tested using the SAS procedures for independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 14, which asked respondents to identify if the courses taken during their study abroad experience were more rigorous, less rigorous, or about the same level of academic rigor.

**Table 10. t-Values for the Level of Rigor of Study Abroad Coursework.**

	Df	t-Value	Probability
Level of Rigor	172	-1.12	.2633

The t-test probability of the perceived level of academic rigor is above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ . Differences were tested and resulted in a chi square probability that is also representative of a probability that their similarities in response were correlated and not due to chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis for the perceived level of rigor is accepted that there is no difference between males and females regarding their perceived level of academic rigor between a study abroad program and their home-university curriculum.

**Table 11. Perception of Academic Rigor in Study Abroad Program.**

Curriculum abroad was:	Males	Females
More Rigorous	21.3%	15.8%
Less Rigorous	51%	48.8%
About the Same	27.7%	35.4%

**Research Question Number Seven**

Research question number seven asked if there was a difference between males and females in the likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over. This was tested using the SAS independent samples t-test. This research question was answered with Survey Question 13, which asked respondents of their likelihood to repeat their study abroad experience on a continuum of very likely, somewhat likely, not sure, not likely, and definitely would not.

**Table 12. t-Values for the Likelihood to Repeat the Study Abroad Experience.**

	Df	t-Value	Probability
Likelihood to Repeat Study Abroad	66.5	.53	.6008

The t-test probability of the perceived likelihood of repeating the study abroad experience is above the probability threshold, significant at  $p=.05$ . Differences were tested and resulted in chi-square probabilities that are also representative of a probability that their similarities in response were correlated and not due to chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis for the likelihood of repeating the study abroad experience is accepted that there is no difference between males and females regarding their likelihood of repeating the study abroad experience given the chance to do it over.

**Table 13. Likelihood to Repeat the Study Abroad Experience.**

Likelihood to repeat:	Males	Females
Very Likely	89.1%	91.4%
Somewhat Likely	6.5%	5.5%
Not Sure	2.2%	2.3%
Not Likely	2.2%	0.8%
Definitely Would Not	0%	0%

## **Additional Thoughts on the Data**

Overall, very few significant differences were found between the genders based on the research questions that were devised to guide this study. While there were a few differences that will be addressed in Chapter V, it is apparent that males and females who have successfully studied abroad basically assess those experiences very similarly. These similarities are apparent in virtually all questions and categories that were addressed. Males and females show very limited differences regarding studying abroad in their thoughts on the perceived barriers, perceived benefits, influential people, promotional factors, influential reasons, academic rigor, and likelihood to repeat their experience. Therefore, some additional efforts were made to further analyze the data and look for possible hidden differences that were not evident when strictly analyzing data based solely on gender.

An independent samples t-test was performed to see if any significant differences existed between those respondents who indicated they had studied abroad prior to fall 2003 and those students who were studying abroad for the very first time during fall 2003. Approximately one quarter (n=43) of respondents had previous study abroad experience while three quarters (n=133) had never studied abroad. Again, the major research areas of interest were tested for differences including motivating factors to study abroad, influential people in the decision to study abroad, perceived barriers/obstacles, influential promotional activities, benefits of studying abroad, perceived level of academic rigor, and the likelihood to repeat. When all factors are considered among all of these survey questions, there are a total of 35 response factors to compare (i.e., six positive influence items, nine potential benefit items, six possible barrier items, etc.). As with the analysis between genders, there were virtually no differences distinguished based on whether or not the respondent had prior study abroad experience. The only significant difference on all 35 possibilities identified with a t-test was the benefit item of feeling the study abroad experience inspired them to do so again (2.4,  $p=.0176$ ). Of those students who had previously studied abroad prior to fall 2003, 86% agreed or strongly agreed that this experience abroad inspired them to consider studying abroad again at some point in the future. Conversely, only 70% of those students who had not previously been abroad stated they were inspired to do so again. This difference makes sense as those students who had previously been abroad proved their inspiration in wanting to go abroad again by doing so in fall 2003. Those respondents for whom this was the first experience abroad may feel this stronger inspiration after being back in the U.S. for a longer period of time and having more time to reflect on the overall experience.

In further analysis of the data, an independent samples t-test was performed to see if any significant differences existed between those respondents who indicated they attended public universities and those respondents who attended private universities. Approximately 41% (n=73) of respondents attended public universities while 59% (n=103) attended a private university. Again, the major research areas of interest were tested for differences including motivating factors to study abroad, influential people in the decision to study abroad, perceived barriers/obstacles, influential promotional activities, benefits of studying abroad, perceived level of academic rigor, and the likelihood to repeat. As with the other results, very few significant differences were observed. However, there were specifically more differences noted between private and public university attendees in the potential barriers/obstacles to studying abroad as well as the perceived benefits of studying abroad.

Regarding potential barriers, t-tests indicated significant differences in affordability/cost (-4.79,  $p=.0001$ ), graduation delay (-2.59,  $p=.0104$ ), and involvement with on-campus activities (4.94,  $p=.0001$ ). Those students who attended a public university were more likely to indicate that affordability of studying abroad and the potential delay of graduation are potential barriers. Regarding the cost issue, 92% of students attending public institutions agreed or strongly agreed that cost was a barrier, while only 74% of those attending private institutions agreed or strongly agreed. Even more striking in the difference is the fact that 55% of public attendees strongly agreed that cost was a barrier while only 25% of private attendees strongly agreed. With graduation delay as a potential barrier, 75% of public university students agreed or strongly agreed while only 54% of private university students agreed or strongly agreed that a delay in graduation was a potential barrier. Those students who attended a private university were more likely to indicate that a study abroad experience could conflict with other on-campus activities as 58% agreed or strongly agreed, while only 30% of public university students felt that interference with on-campus activities was a potential barrier.

Several other t-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to try to identify any other hidden differences that emerged based upon gender within the study. Attempts were made to collapse major areas of study into several categories, collapse regions of the country that participants considered their home, and collapse the areas that participants studied while overseas. All of these further categorizations of demo-

graphic information were done to see if differences might emerge based on gender. The results were virtually the same as the data generated by the original research questions and no significant differences emerged.

In Chapter V, the reader is provided an overall summary of this study as well as conclusions based on the data analysis. Recommendations for further research and practice are also presented.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

The data collected in this research study indicate there are very few differences between males and females who have studied abroad on a wide variety of questions regarding their perceptions, attitudes, and thoughts toward studying abroad. A sampling of several questions noted later in this chapter further highlights the similarities in responses from survey respondents.

Currently within the United States system of higher education, the participation of students studying abroad is at an historic all-time high. University personnel as well as external constituents are recognizing the importance and significance of this educational component. The number of students who have participated in such opportunities has grown at a dramatic rate during the past two decades. However, the simple fact remains that the majority of students electing to study abroad are females. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of those students (both males and females) who have studied abroad. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the motivating factors that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
2. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the people who positively influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
3. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the factors viewed as potential obstacles to studying abroad?
4. Is there a significant difference between males and females in the promotional activities that influenced them to pursue a study abroad experience?
5. Is there a significant difference between males and females in how they viewed the perceived benefits of studying abroad?
6. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of academic rigor in a study abroad program?
7. Is there a significant difference between males and females in their stated likelihood of repeating their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over?

The respondents consisted of 179 college students who studied abroad during the fall 2003. The students studied in a variety of locations throughout the world and were from a range of colleges and universities within the United States. All students responded to a variety of questions focused on their study abroad experience including motivational factors for going abroad, influential people who encouraged them to study abroad, perceived benefits from studying abroad, a comparison of the perceived rigor or coursework abroad versus the home-campus curriculum, likelihood to repeat their study abroad experience given the chance to do it over, and potential barriers to those students electing not to study abroad.

Demographic information on the respondents was also gathered. This information included major field of study, year in school, grade point average, home region in the United States, and gender.

## **Conclusions**

### **Research Question Number One**

There were no significant differences between males and females in the motivating factors that influenced them to study abroad. There were six factors that respondents indicated their level of agreement with regarding each factor's respective level of influence on their decision to study abroad. For several of the factors including geographic location of the study abroad, affordability of the program, the opportunity to explore other cultures, and a feeling of boredom with their current situation, the levels of agreement (based on the agree and strongly agree responses) between the two genders were virtually identical. The other influential factors of the academic fit of the study abroad with their current curriculum and the opportunity for career enhancement also resulted in similar levels of agreement between genders. Therefore, those factors cited as possible influential motivations for a student to consider studying abroad are weighted very similarly by both genders.

Over 90% of both males and females agreed the exploration of a new culture as well as the geographic location as factors that were positive influences on their decision to study abroad. Talburt and Stewart (1999) found that acquisition of cultural knowledge and a desire to travel as specific reasons for students to study abroad, and the results of this study directly concur with those findings. Study abroad advisors and personnel should consider these motivating factors when visiting with potential students (both males and females) contemplating a study abroad opportunity. Conversely, fewer than half of both male and female respondents agreed that affordability of the program and feelings of boredom with their current situation were influential factors. These factors were not judged by either gender as significant in their decision to study abroad; other motivating factors aside from these should be cultivated and emphasized by study abroad professionals.

### **Research Question Number Two**

There were no significant differences between males and females among five of the seven individuals positively influencing them to study abroad. There were seven different individuals whom respondents indicated their level of agreement with regarding each individual's respective level of positive influence on their decision to study abroad. For several of the potential influential people including a faculty member from within the respondent's area of study, a study abroad advisor, and a friend, the levels of agreement (based on the agree and strongly agree responses) between the two genders were virtually identical. The other influential individuals including a faculty member from outside the respondent's area of study as well as a sibling also resulted in levels of agreement between genders.

However, there were significant differences noted between the genders in their levels of agreement on the influence of parents on their decision to study abroad. Regarding the influence of parents, 22% of male respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had a positive influence on their decision to study abroad. Meanwhile, only 11% of female respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the influence of parents. Likewise, 66% of females agreed or strongly agreed that parents had a positive influence in their decision to study abroad. Only 53% of males agreed or strongly agreed that parents had a positive influence in their decision. This difference is significant and indicates that study abroad personnel should interact differently with potential male and female study abroad participants when discussing the role of parents. It is evident that the influence of parents is not as strong in the decision-making process of males. Perhaps male students are not as apt to seek the approval or affection of their parents' satisfaction with this decision as are female students. The role of parents should likewise be stressed differently with each gender.

Additionally, there were significant differences noted between the genders in their levels of agreement on the influence of other relatives (i.e., grandparents, cousins, etc.) on their decision to study abroad. Regarding this influence, only 19% of males agreed or strongly agreed that these other relatives positively influenced their decision to study abroad while nearly twice as many females (37%) agreed or strongly agreed that other relatives were influential in the decision. Again, as with the influence of parents, it is evident that other relatives play a larger role in the decision of female students to study abroad. When taken together, it is clear that males do not feel positive influential support from family members (excluding siblings) in the same way that females do. Perhaps more education and communication needs to be provided by the campus study abroad personnel to the families of male students. In other words, if males do not agree in the same fashion as females that these family members are a positive influence in their decision, perhaps it is up to study abroad professionals to assist in reaching out and emphasizing the importance and significance of this decision to those family members. This would help prospective male students garner more support and encouragement from their family to make the decision to study abroad.

### **Research Question Number Three**

There were no significant differences between males and females among four of the six factors viewed as potential barriers or obstacles to studying abroad. There were six different potential barriers that respondents indicated their level of agreement with regarding each factor's level of significance as a barrier or obstacle preventing students from studying abroad. For several of the potential barriers including the fear of temporarily leaving family and friends, involvement with on-campus activities, and a potential delay in graduation resulting from studying abroad, the levels of agreement (based on the agree and strongly agree responses) between the two genders were virtually identical. Another potential barrier of membership in a fraternity or sorority also resulted in levels of agreement between genders.

However, there were significant differences noted between the genders in their levels of agreement on the impact of such barriers as the study abroad experience conflicting with a job or internship opportunity at home and the affordability/cost of studying abroad. Regarding the impact of conflicting with a job or internship, 65% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this could be a significant barrier discouraging students from studying abroad. Meanwhile, only 49% of male respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a job opportunity was a potential barrier. Likewise, only 14% of females disagreed or strongly disagreed that job/internship opportunities were potential barriers to studying abroad while 28% of males disagreed or strongly disagreed that job and internship opportunities pose significant barriers. An independent samples t test confirmed the significant difference and indicates that a commonly held belief that male students are preoccupied with job or internship opportunities in lieu of studying abroad may not be true. It is evident within this study that females view the potential conflict that studying abroad may pose to a job or internship possibility is a larger barrier to going abroad in their mind than it is for their male counterparts.

Additionally, there were significant differences noted between the genders in their levels of agreement on the affordability/cost of studying abroad as a potential barrier in the decision to study abroad. Among the respondents, 68% of male students agreed or strongly agreed that cost was a potential barrier to studying abroad, while 87% of females agreed or strongly agreed that cost was a significant concern as a potential barrier. Likewise, 13% of males disagreed or strongly disagreed that cost posed a potential obstacle while only 6% of females disagreed or strongly disagreed that cost is an obstacle to studying abroad. An independent samples t-test confirmed the significant difference between genders and indicates that females are more concerned with cost as a potential barrier to studying abroad than are males.

### **Research Question Number Four**

There were no significant differences between males and females regarding the promotional activities that influenced them to pursue studying abroad. There were five promotional activities that respondents indicated their level of agreement with regarding each activity's respective level of influence on their decision to study abroad. For several of the activities including a campus study abroad office, their university's website, and a specific study abroad program's website, the levels of agreement (based on the agree and strongly agree responses) between the two genders were virtually identical. The other promotional activities were the study abroad activity fairs on campus and non-campus based Internet resources. These two activities also resulted in somewhat similar levels of agreement between the genders. Therefore, those promotional activities considered influential in the decision to study abroad were weighted very similarly by both genders.

### **Research Question Number Five**

There were no significant differences between males and females among eight of the nine perceived benefits derived from studying abroad. There were nine different potential benefits that respondents indicated their level of agreement with regarding each factor's level of significance as a benefit resulting from studying abroad. For several of the perceived benefits including an enhancement of critical thinking skills, enhanced lifelong career opportunities, greater interest in world events, better adaptability to new situations, consideration of studying abroad again while in college, and interest in traveling or working abroad upon graduation, the levels of agreement (based on the agree and strongly agree responses) between the two genders were virtually identical. All of these perceived benefits align closely to the positive outcomes from studying abroad identified by Peterson (2002). Two other potential benefits, a motivation to learn a new language and a re-thinking of major and career goals, also resulted in similar levels of agreement between genders.

However, there were significant differences noted between the genders in their levels of agreement on the benefit of a delay in graduation due to studying abroad. A possible delay in graduation due to studying abroad is obviously not a potential benefit, but it was listed as one of the items in the survey question where the eight potential benefits were listed. On the Graduation Delay factor in Survey Question 10, 21% of males

agreed or strongly agreed that studying abroad has significantly delayed their date of graduation while only 5% of females agreed with that statement. Therefore, study abroad advisors should ensure they communicate the correct facts to male students interested in studying abroad. In many cases, courses taken during a semester or year abroad can fit precisely into a student's curricular plan, and those details must be addressed and confirmed well in advance of the student ever heading abroad. These are critical decision factors that can significantly impact graduation expectations, and require cooperation and coordination from the student's academic advisor, faculty, and possibly the overseeing academic dean.

### **Research Question Number Six**

There was no significant difference between males and females in their perceived level of the academic rigor of their study abroad program. Fifty-one percent of males and 49% of females felt the program abroad was less rigorous than the coursework at their home institution. Conversely, 21% of males and 16% of females felt the coursework abroad was more rigorous than that of their home institution. This research question does not have implicit marketing ramifications but was instead being researched to see if significant differences existed. Since no differences exist in the respondents' perception, there is nothing more that can be done with this question. It will have no bearing on future marketing efforts made to prospective male students. Study abroad programs should not be marketed as either significantly more or less difficult than home-institution coursework. Rather, the programs should be offered and promoted for the opportunity they provide students in enhancing their overall collegiate academic experience.

### **Research Question Number Seven**

There was no significant difference between males and females in their likelihood of repeating the study abroad experience given the chance to do it over. Eighty-nine percent of male respondents indicated they were very likely to repeat the experience given the chance, and 91% of female respondents indicated they were very likely to repeat the experience. Less than 5% of males and less than 4% of females indicated they were not sure or were not likely to repeat the experience. To further encourage male students, study abroad advisors should consider using testimonials, letters of support, and male returnee students in marketing to and communicating with potential male students contemplating studying abroad. The evidence is strong that male students who do study abroad enjoy the experience and would repeat their time abroad given the chance to do so. This is an important message and should be used in marketing to their peers across campus.

### **Limitations**

Four limitations of this research study were uncovered after data collection and analysis. These limitations are described in the paragraphs that follow.

The first limitation of this study related to respondent demographics. Fully, 80% of the respondents indicated that they grew up in regions represented by only 16 states. Further highlighting a possible lack of diversity in respondents, 90% of the survey participants identified themselves as Caucasian. Yet another concern was that 26.3% of the survey respondents were males, which is below the actual national figure of 34%. Finally, 70% of respondents studied abroad in Europe.

A second limitation concerned the colleges/universities and geographic locations from which the student responses were solicited. There were a total of 31 institutions from throughout the United States that initially showed interest in assisting with the dissemination of the survey on their campuses. However, students from only 14 campuses actually participated in the study. These institutions were primarily from the Midwest and Northeast areas of the United States. There was very little to no participation from universities in the Western and Southern parts of the United States.

A third limitation related to the survey instrument that was created and used. The questions were somewhat limited in their scope. It can be debated that additional questions and areas should have been addressed to more thoroughly answer the fundamental questions. The instrument certainly did not address all possible factors that could have been included in this study.

Finally, there is always a legitimate limitation when research is conducted utilizing a self-directed questionnaire. Respondents may not have correctly interpreted questions posed and, therefore, may not have provided information sought by the researcher.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are offered. In the first part of this section, further research is described that might be conducted to address the limitations of the current study as well as to more clearly understand the variables impacting a student's decision to study abroad. In the second section,



recommendations are included that should immediately be considered for implementation by study abroad personnel. The steps proposed are intended to prompt study abroad professionals to take a close look at their own campuses and current marketing practices.

## **Research**

First, the limitations noted in the current study might be addressed in four ways. To obtain a more diverse pool of respondents, one might seek the assistance of NAFSA: Association of International Educators in the recruitment process. National data are collected annually that would be useful for designing a survey for a more diverse audience. To obtain a greater variety of universities and colleges representing a geographic cross-section of the United States, it is suggested that the 20 largest study abroad universities be invited to participate in a highly focused study (rather than through a mass email). In an effort to improve the survey instrument used in this study, it would be useful to form a focus group of students who have studied abroad to edit questions or to formulate new questions. Finally, to obtain the most accurate information from respondents, it is suggested that they be given an email-based mechanism to directly contact the researcher with questions they may have.

Next, another study might take into consideration additional variables when exploring differences among genders. For example, this research did not specifically address intercollegiate athletics or lack of foreign language preparation as possible barriers. Athletics is a significant factor for a great number of students, especially at private and smaller institutions where the proportion of athletic participation may be quite high. Due to the intense preparation and practice schedules as well as the time commitment, athletics can be a significant obstacle to going abroad for an extended period of time and should be further explored. Inexperience or lack of knowledge with a foreign language can likewise be a significant barrier. Students simply may not feel comfortable and therefore have no desire to study abroad if they only speak English. Each of these two factors is significant and should be further explored as potential obstacles.

Ensuing research also needs to more closely address the significance of peer influence. This study did not explicitly consider the extent to which peer-to-peer influence encourages (or discourages) students to study abroad. With the significant socialization and relationship development that is promoted during college, this needs further investigation.

It might also be important to study the population of students who have elected not to study abroad. Since this research did not yield a large number of differences between genders who have studied abroad, perhaps more might be learned from researching those students who have elected not to study abroad.

More research is required to identify the influence of a variety of factors that may have impacted study abroad participants at an earlier age. The frequency and variety of travel experiences students have had prior to arriving in college should be considered as well as whether or not they were exposed to study abroad possibilities in high school through field trip activities or communication and information from prospective colleges. The quantity and quality of information that students have available to them prior to ever setting foot on campus may be very influential in their decision to study abroad.

This research showed that females perceived cost to be a greater overall barrier, but also felt their parents were a more positive influence on their decision to study abroad, than did males. Therefore, more focused research could be conducted on these variables to identify how students are paying for their study abroad experiences. Perhaps females are receiving more financial support from their parents and their perception of cost, while a barrier, is not significant enough to stop them from studying abroad due to the parental support they receive. Perhaps this lack of perceived positive influence that males feel from their parents translates into a lack of financial support. Additional financial options may then need to be addressed and promoted to males to increase their study abroad participation.

As indicated in this study, there were some differences noted between those students who attended public and private universities. While this study focused on differences between genders, additional research might be conducted to look for differences between students based on the type of university they attend. Information garnered from this research may assist study abroad personnel in more closely tailoring their promotional and recruiting efforts to these populations.

This study focused entirely on U.S. students who chose to leave the country and study abroad. A much larger number of international students enter the United States each year to study compared to the number of

U.S. students who go abroad. These students could also be surveyed and differences could be explored between the genders of international students. A comparison of international students and U.S. students studying abroad might uncover data that would assist in understanding the gender gap.

An opportunity exists to survey male students who studied abroad a number of years ago and have been in the workforce for 5, 10, 15, or 20 years. At later stages in their lives, they would have a better perspective on the actual impact such experiences have meant to them. Research such as this might be facilitated through a comprehensive longitudinal study, wherein respondents are asked to describe benefits their experience abroad had on their professional and personal lives, career decisions, global outlook, political philosophies, and other related topics at identified intervals of time.

## **Practice**

With few differences found between the genders on most research questions in this study, other considerations must be given serious thought as study abroad personnel and universities look to increase enrollment of male study abroad participants. It is clear that males and females generally view the same benefits and influential factors encouraging study abroad participation. Moreover, males and females similarly view obstacles and barriers that would prevent other students from studying abroad. Both genders also feel very strongly about wanting to repeat their study abroad experience given the opportunity to do so.

Therefore, since males and females view study abroad in much the same light, study abroad personnel may need to look internally at their own offices. Who is working in these offices? Are they likely to be individuals who males are comfortable working with? Perhaps male students might feel more comfortable interacting with male study abroad personnel. This is not a certain supposition, but rather a suggestion that merits further investigation.

An analysis of the study abroad program websites in February 2006 for the University of Indiana, the University of Minnesota, Ohio State University, and the University of North Carolina reveals that collectively there are 35 females and only 5 males working as study abroad advisors in those campus offices. This is a very small sample, but further exploration at more campuses reveals similar trends. Since study abroad advisors are the individuals who work directly with students pondering an experience overseas, perhaps male students would be more likely to explore study abroad opportunities if they interacted with more males in those roles. This is not to suggest a sudden change needs to be made in hiring practices, but it does raise some interesting questions when nearly 90% of the advisors at four large, study abroad leading universities are of one gender.

What does the study abroad marketing literature look like? Are the brochures, catalogs, posters, handouts, and other materials likely to appeal to males? What is featured in the promotional photographs and accompanying text? Study abroad offices may need to conduct focus groups with male students on their respective campuses to ensure their materials appeal to and attract males. This is cautious work since the idea is certainly not to create promotional materials that only appeal to males and are not appealing to female students. However, focus groups encompassing students of both genders would yield valuable insight into how males and females perceive the current campus marketing literature and provoke ideas for how future materials might be formed.

Are those male students who have studied abroad being used on campuses to assist in efforts to recruit new additional potential male participants? Is the study abroad office using male study abroad returnees to gather their feedback and satisfaction of the program along with a testimonial to encourage more students? A February 2006 analysis of the study abroad office websites at the University of Illinois, Michigan State University, Penn State University, and the University of Minnesota reveals that these campuses all have testimonials and contact information from students who have successfully studied abroad. The idea is that prospective students pondering studying abroad for the first time might contact those students who have returned to gather more information and then further consider studying abroad. However, the websites at those four institutions reveal that 288 female students are featured, while only 64 male students are featured. That only about one third of students studying abroad nationally are male makes it difficult to accurately feature a fair balance of males and females using these kinds of peer advising strategies. However, these four campuses combined feature student peers and testimonials that are 82% female and only 18% male – nearly twice the gender imbalance of the actual participation figures. University study abroad offices should seriously consider recruiting and using those male students in efforts to recruit new participating students from their campus. Male students who have successfully studied abroad should be sought and used as peer advisors to work with other males who are considering studying abroad.

Are concerted efforts being made by study abroad offices to work with male dominated social groups and clubs on campus? Study abroad advisors should meet with and deliver presentations specifically tailored to fraternities and other organizations that may have a large male membership. The incorporation of peer advisors previously described might be used to assist with these presentations. These types of focused efforts toward the male population will assist in spreading the word on campus and encouraging more males to study abroad, further helping to alleviate the gender imbalance.

### **Final Thoughts**

In November 2005, the United States Senate passed Senate Resolution 308 designating 2006 as the "Year of Study Abroad." This bipartisan bill acknowledges that studying abroad is an important way to share American values, to create global goodwill, to work toward a more peaceful society, to increase international trade, to better develop cultural understanding, and to help individuals be more informed about the world. The Resolution "encourages secondary schools, institutions of higher learning, businesses, and government programs to promote and expand study abroad opportunities" (School for International Training, 2005, para. 1) during the Year of Study Abroad. The fact that study abroad is on the agenda of the highest levels of the U.S. government with bipartisan support further reinforces its distinction in society and the esteem with which it is held.

Indeed, study abroad is a growing concept throughout American colleges and universities. Students across the United States are more actively and aggressively pursuing the idea of fulfilling a portion of their academic career in another country. Given the current geo-political conditions of the world, this enhanced understanding and sharing between cultures is critical. A fundamental shortcoming of study abroad programs from across U.S. campuses, however, is their inability to attract male students in the same proportion as females.

As this gender gap continues, it simply means that not enough American college students are fully taking advantage of this opportunity. This is a legitimate and significant societal concern as it has implications and ramifications beyond just those individual students; it means that not enough members of the American society are exposed to external viewpoints and cultural differences. Attempting to better understand and appreciate reasons for this gap assists in developing new marketing and promotional approaches that will better appeal to and encourage male students to study abroad.

This research explored a fundamental problem facing those in today's collegiate study abroad environment – that of the gender gap. A wide variety of universities across the United States are promoting study abroad and integrating it into the mainstream of their curriculum. Additionally, students and parents alike as well as the general public, potential employers, and a variety of governmental entities are expecting their future leaders to be prepared with study abroad experiences. The enhanced cultural awareness, adaptability to diverse situations, and better understanding of the complex world are all cited as positive outcomes of studying abroad while in college. As Marcum (2001) writes, "Americans believe...going abroad to study gives students distinctive learning opportunities that they can't get at home or online – direct experiences of new languages, cultures, and pedagogies – that prepare them for careers in a global, knowledge-based economy" (para. 1). As study abroad becomes more of an expectation and desire within our society, it is imperative that this gender gap is more fully understood and eliminated so that the greatest number of students possible take full advantage of the opportunity to study abroad.

## **About the Author**

Steven W. Shirley is Vice-President and Dean of Student Affairs at Dakota State University (DSU) in Madison, South Dakota. While at DSU, Shirley has been involved in statewide efforts to bring greater attention and emphasis to international education and study abroad opportunities in higher education, including helping to organize the first statewide Study Abroad conference.

Prior to DSU, Shirley was a faculty member in the Center for Business and Technology at the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC). While at UMC, Shirley also led campus efforts to increase study abroad activities and served as the campus coordinator for the University of Minnesota's Curriculum Integration project. He has also previously taught undergraduate classes in the College of Business and Public Administration at the University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks, ND and a graduate course in the Counseling and Human Resource Development department at South Dakota State University in Brookings, SD.

Shirley holds an undergraduate and Master's degree in Business from UND. His MBA Independent Study project was entitled, "A Country Risk Assessment of Hong Kong." He earned his PhD from the University of North Dakota in Teaching & Learning focused on Higher Education with the dissertation, "The Gender Gap in Post-Secondary Study Abroad: Understanding and Marketing to Male Students." He is also a graduate of Harvard University's Institute for Educational Management, a summer Program in Professional Education.

Shirley has presented results from his PhD dissertation at both the regional and national NAFSA conferences, including being voted as the Regional Highlight Session at the 2006 NAFSA Region IV conference in St. Louis. Shirley was also a presenter at the University of Minnesota's national conference, "Internationalizing the Curriculum," and a contributor to the corresponding monograph, "Internationalizing Undergraduate Education: Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum."

Shirley has led several student and faculty groups abroad on various educational and cultural exchange trips. He has also taught English to adult learners in Slovakia. Shirley has presented research and papers at regional and national conferences on varied topics including the gender gap in study abroad, integrating international education, technology-based learning, instructional innovation, and service learning.

Steve Shirley currently serves as the South Dakota membership chair for NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) and serves on the NASPA Region IV-West advisory Board. He is active in Rotary International having served as Club President of the Rotary Club of Crookston, MN. He has also been active serving on the local Boards of Directors of multiple Chambers of Commerce and serves as a Junior Achievement volunteer.

## **The AIFS Foundation mission**

The AIFS Foundation Mission is to provide educational and cultural exchange opportunities to foster greater understanding among the people of the world.

## **About the AIFS Foundation**

The AIFS Foundation, an independent, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) tax exempt public charity, was established in 1967 with the assistance of the late Senator Robert Kennedy to help young people from many nations and diverse cultures to understand each other better. The AIFS Foundation provides grants and scholarships to students for participation in study abroad programs and provides grants to high schools and institutions to encourage international and educational travel. The AIFS Foundation also sponsors the Academic Year in America program which, every year, enables more than 1,000 international teenage students to spend a semester or academic year with an American family while attending the local high school. The AIFS Foundation is designated by the U.S. Department of State to issue the J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa for this program.

The foundation seeks to fulfill its mission by:

- Organizing high quality educational programs at affordable prices enabling young people to live and study abroad.
- Supporting educational and travel opportunities for disadvantaged youth.
- Developing cooperative programs between organizations both public and private who share our goals.
- Providing grants to individuals for participation in culturally enriching homestay and educational programs.

