AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING POTENTIAL OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

By

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To my loving parents Sue and John Strange, for saying yes, and figuring it out later
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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING POTENTIAL OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

By

Hannah Elizabeth Strange

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Chair: Heather Gibson
Major: Recreation, Parks, and Tourism

Recent literature has stated that study abroad is becoming a necessary part of undergraduate education. Despite criticism of their ability to provide the same student development outcomes, students are participating in short-term instead of semester-long programs. This study used transformative learning to investigate impact of program length, type, and cultural distance on perspective transformation.

A post-trip online survey was used to measure the degree of transformative learning achieved. Students responded to a transformative learning scale to evaluate their perspective transformation. Participants were asked about program type, learning components, host country, and program length. The primary analysis tools were frequencies, ANOVA, and thematic content analyses.

Differences in transformative learning were found between the short and medium, long and extra-long program groups. Programs 18 days or shorter had significantly lower levels of transformative learning. Statistics showed that transformative learning was significantly lower in one of the culturally similar groups, compared to the other three cultural distance groups, however this finding is
inconclusive. There were no statistical differences among program type and experiential learning on overall transformative learning. This study shows that shorter programs may not achieve the same degree of transformative learning as longer programs, although the results show that students may not need to be abroad for an entire semester. This is the first study to provide empirical support for this much discussed contention and is a starting point for future research in this area. For study abroad programmers this study provides ideas about program length and providing beneficial learning outcomes.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It is now widely accepted by many US post-secondary institutions, if not the students themselves, that study abroad is a necessary component of any undergraduate education (Tarrant, 2010). Once reserved as a luxury for those who sought to invest in a globalized society, Steves (2012) asserts that given the increasingly intertwined international environment, we must now comprehend that an international education is a necessity if the US is to produce effective leaders and innovators in the 21st century. Furthermore, the Commission of the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005) explains that what nations do not know absolutely can hurt them. The commission argues that education in the US is critically lacking in globalized experience, so for the future of all students, and of the nation, international competencies need to be prioritized.

An initial awareness of international education occurred after World War II, but the Institute of International Education (2009) reports that it is in the past five years that we have seen a large increase in the number of program opportunities and partnerships offered to college students. Indeed, it has been suggested that travel as a method of learning is valuable for a person’s education (Robalik, 2006). Travel has long been thought to provide the stimulation, challenges, and opportunities required for substantive interpersonal and intercultural learning to occur (Vogt, 1976). One of the most popular modes of educational youth travel in the United States is study abroad (Welch, 2010).

UNESCO statistics (2004), show that worldwide more than 1.5 million students studied abroad in 2003. In the 2009/10 academic year, 270,604 US students studied
abroad (Institute International Education, 2011). This statistic represents a 3.9% increase from the year before, yet it is still less than 2% of US students in the higher education system. While the statistics are cautionary in their own right, it is in the outcomes of international education that research is inconclusive. The intercultural goals of study abroad programs are ill defined and frequently go unmeasured (Ritz, 2011). Despite the pervasive philosophy that study abroad learning objectives should go beyond academic content, there has been a lack of attention placed on achieving holistic outcomes in large numbers of programs (Pedersen, 2010). Considering that study abroad is a substantial commitment and expense for institutions and students alike, it is important to know the impacts that various types of programs have on students (Hensley & Sell, 1979). At institutions such as Harvard, study abroad will soon be a degree requirement; if this is going to be an indicator of the future of study abroad, it should be deemed necessary to monitor the impacts of international education (Tarrant, 2010). In doing this, it will be possible to not only guarantee that every student has the opportunity to experience a globalized education, but also ensure that it is beneficial in preparing them for an increasingly interconnected world.

In order to ensure that students who do study abroad are truly benefiting from their programs, it is essential to understand whether students are or are not gaining cultural and academic competencies. Additionally there needs to be an understanding as to what types of environment are most conducive to providing a transformative education. Mezirow (2003), states that transformative learning encompasses a life-enhancing change (Brown, 2009). Where students have experienced transformative learning, they are often more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally
able to change, ultimately showing higher connectedness to the global environment (Mezirow, 2003). It is possible that transformative learning is more frequently seen in study abroad when an experiential learning program has been executed (Perry, 2011). Perry further explains that experiential learning is defined as the type of education whereby knowledge and meaning are grounded through an active extension of experiences.

Furthermore, it is possible that the cultural distance between the host country and the United States impacts the amount of learning achieved (Klooster, van Wijk, Go & Rekom, 2008). Cultural distance is defined as a measurement of the overall difference between the subtle, intangible, and complex nature of two cultures (Shenkar, 2001; Galtung, 1965; Kogut & Singh, 1988). Bhawak and Breslin (2000) suggest that where there is a greater cultural distance, culture shock is likely to be higher and thus, learning is affected.

Through the use of transformative and experiential learning theory applied to various programming, including programs in countries with varying levels of cultural distance, perhaps a greater understanding of the academic, personal, intercultural and professional outcomes that students are experiencing may be forthcoming.

**Statement of the Problem**

While there is a collective assertion that effective study abroad programs will result in learning on an academic, personal, professional and intercultural level, there is a distinct lack of empirical support or consensus as to which type of program is most effective in achieving these goals (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006). There are many different types of study abroad programs. Length can vary from one
week to one academic year, programs can be an exchange program, located through a
provider, or faculty-led, and to date very little is known about what teaching style is most
appropriate for various programs (Hoff, 2005). Research to date has focused almost
entirely on the academic outcomes of study abroad, statistics on participation and
satisfaction, motivation, or the opportunity for students to experience change in their
global citizenry (Pedersen, 2010; Tarrant, 2010). Subsequently it has been difficult to
narrow down any program characteristics that result in more beneficial outcomes for the
student and society as a whole.

Study abroad has gradually become more attractive to students wishing to
experience an international education. Unfortunately many study abroad workers have
not taken into account exactly what is gained through international studies or
encouraged quality programming (Hoff). Due to the annual increase in the number of
students studying abroad, Hoff indicates that it is essential to now focus not only on
getting students to participate, but also on the anticipated outcomes. While the
proportion of students have increased threefold in the last decade (Institute of
International Education, 2011), approximately 50% of those students are participating in
programs less than six weeks in length (Chieffo & Griffiths. 2004). Though the popularity
of these programs has a positive impact on statistics showing outgoing students, there
has been criticism of their ability to provide similar levels of transformative learning
(Ritz, 2011). Currently, few studies have examined the potential for short-term
programs to have as much impact as traditional long-term programs (Ritz. 2011). In
addition, while some programs provide 24/7 field experience, lecturer availability and a
diverse teaching staff, others simply transfer credit from one traditional institution to
another (Aguilar & Gingerich. 2002). Some programs do little more than place the students in a practically identical classroom that happens to be in a different country, while others are intense holistic learning experiences. Because of these differences, Aguilar and Gingerich argue that study abroad is not experiential by definition and all programs are not created equal. This seems to suggest there is a lack of knowledge on programming components and their impact on the benefits and outcomes of study abroad warrants further study.

Another aspect of study abroad that has been overlooked in previous literature is cultural distance. Shenkar (2001) defines cultural distance as a conceptualization of the complex, intangible differences between cultures, where a high cultural distance indicates a large number of cultural differences between the home and host countries. According to Ng, Lee and Soutar (2007) cultural distance can have a significant impact on the amount of culture shock a student experiences, ultimately impacting their overall educational experience. Rohrlich (1991) further explains that depending on the cultural distance, students will have different relationships with the host country and experience different levels of psychological distress and change. Ultimately cultural distance has a potentially significant impact on the student experience and as such warrants further investigation within the realm of international education.

Between the variety of long-term programs, lack of research on short-term programs and the impact of cultural distance as well as the influx of independent educational travel providers, it is essential to identify program characteristics that are most likely to contribute to a students’ holistic education (Kiely. 2004).
Conceptual Framework

In order to most effectively investigate the potentially transformative and holistic outcomes of study abroad, this study used transformative learning theory and experiential learning theory as combined conceptual frameworks.

Transformative Learning Theory

Originating out of the adult/continuing education field, transformation was first used by Mezirow in 1978 (Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow (1991) asserts that only through reflection, active learning, and placing ourselves in an uncomfortable situation are we fully able to develop our understanding of the world and of ourselves. If students are to be empowered to become globally integrated citizens, a rigorous learning compact should be applied in program design (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). Tarrant (2010) suggests that transformative learning theory has the potential to provide the critical framework necessary to test the appropriateness of various program aspects currently popular in study abroad.

Transformative learning was born out of a constructivist paradigm which means we construct our knowledge based on our experiences in the world (Moore, 2005). Transformative learning is achieved when a change occurs to our frame of reference as a result of an event or experience (Mezirow, 1997). As a consequence of our societal, cultural, and personal upbringing we have subconsciously formed a frame of reference, which refers to the way in which we view and interpret the world, thereby driving our actions (Pagano & Roselle, 2009). Frames of reference are built up from what Mezirow (1997) terms habits of mind and points of view. Habits of mind are expansive personal theories about the world that are changed with difficulty, such as ethnocentrism. Points
of view are smaller scale ideas that are related to our values, judgments and attitudes
towards specific actions or ideas; they are constantly regenerating depending on the
world around us (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (2003) explains that we define our world
based on our frame of reference, where a change occurs to our frame of reference, we
can expect to see a subsequent change in action.

Mezirow (2003), suggests that because of the existence of these pre-conceived
notions, learning must occur through a four stage process: 1. Elaborate our existing
point of view, 2. Establish a new point of view, 3. Transform our point of view or 4.
Become aware of the world around us and be critically reflective of our environment and
actions (Mezirow, 1997). Our ability to change our frame of reference allows us to build
professional competencies such as analytical problem solving, planning and organizing,
communication, teamwork and global understanding. Mezirow (1997) argues that
transformative learning encourages us to be more inclusive, self-reflective and
integrative.

Having explained the outcome of changing a person’s frames of reference, it is
necessary to understand the three methods that encourage transformation. Mezirow
(1991) explains that there are three different domains of learning that are integral in
developing an individual’s frame of reference: instrumental, communicative, and
emancipatory. Essentially, these domains refer to different methods that students use to
promote change. Instrumental learning emphasizes technical and manipulative learning,
for instance learning through a task. Communicative learning is the most frequent as it
is achieved through understanding ideas, or assisting others in understanding. Finally,
emancipatory learning is where the student is able to independently identify the
meaning perspectives that they currently hold and subsequently challenge those that they consider to be distorted (Mezirow, 1991).

In the context of study abroad, Taylor (1998) applied perspective transformation, which is the process of altering our meaning structures. Meaning structures are culturally acquired subconscious perspectives that build our frame of reference. Perspective transformation is achieved through the progression of a ten stage process:


Critical Self-Reflection of Assumptions (CSRA) is an essential aspect of Perspective Transformation (Mezirow, 1997). To achieve growth and learning we must be conscious of our own assumptions and the assumptions of others. In order to facilitate the growth of our skills we must practice recognizing different frames of reference, use our imaginations to reconceptualize global problems and consciously participate in cross-cultural discourse (Mezirow, 1997). Frames of reference that are frequently taken for granted include political orientation, cultural bias, stereotyped attitudes, religious doctrine, moral-ethical norms, psychological preference, aesthetic values, and occupational ideologies (Mezirow, 2003). Study abroad programs that are
structured to allow extensive discourse and self-reflection are more likely to allow students to experience transformative learning. Professors, lecturers, and program designers need to understand the social aspect of learning and encourage the idea that through the use of group projects, case studies, simulations, debates, and other reflective activities, students are likely to become more actively engaged in the class and with each other. Transformative learning theory promotes the idea that educators should act as facilitators, communicating on the same level as students, not as an authority in order to create maximum potential for transformation (Mezirow, 1997). When applied to international education, an overreaching goal of transformative learning is to move students from perspectives that have allowed ethnocentrism and dualistic epistemologies and allow the creation of a new frame of reference that promotes cultural pluralism (Berwick & Whalley, 2000).

**Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential learning is used widely through study abroad literature and therefore, it is essential to understand exactly what is meant by this concept. In its most basic description, experiential education is a way to learn, but also a way of connecting with the community (Pagano & Roselle, 2009). Philosophized by John Dewey (1997), experiential learning emphasizes that contrary to popular belief, experiences are not educational in their own right, but rather need to be reflected upon and analyzed until learning is achieved (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Perry, 2011). Aguilar and Gingerich further explain that experiences have the potential to become knowledge if they are applied and tested through actions.
Perry (2011) explains that experiential learning theory moves one step on from the definition of experiential learning and argues that there is a four stage process to go through before experiential learning can be said to have been achieved. First, students must have a concrete experience, second, students should achieve a reflective observation of the event that occurred, third, students need to abstractly conceptualize what can be learned from the experience, before finally actively experimenting with the knowledge they have gained until it has been grounded solidly into what is known about the world.

In an experiential framework, learning is understood to be a social process in which students must actively engage in order to achieve educational progression (Mezirow, 1997; Tarrant, 2010). In the context of study abroad, experiential learning can make a considerable impact on an individual's ability to understand globally complex problems (Kiely, 2004). Experiential education has the potential to play a critical role in the values and behaviors that students take from study abroad programs, making it essential that programmers fully consider the potential holistic outcomes of their programs and how they are best achieved (Tarrant, 2010; Ritz, 2011).

Transformative and experiential learning theory both assert that in order to maximize educational outcomes students need to be afforded the opportunity to interact with the world around them, critically reflect and analyze their experiences before applying them toward new actions. In identifying the elements that most effectively contribute to a transformative outcome, students and society can be more positively impacted and the conceptual foundation for this study can be formed.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the transformative learning potential of different types of study abroad programs. Specifically, this study examined the influence of program length, experiential learning, and cultural distance of the destination visited on transformative learning outcomes.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. Does transformative learning occur on study abroad programs?
2. Does transformative learning differ by program length?
3. Does transformative learning differ by degree of experiential learning offered?
4. Does transformative learning differ by cultural distance experienced?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
Study Abroad

According to Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen and Hubbard (2006), the past decade has shown a dramatic increase in the number of institutions offering study abroad or other educational travel opportunities, so much so that various universities are now using their study abroad programs as a method of recruiting students to their institution. This increase has likely been born out of a desire to prepare students to compete in a globalized knowledge economy (Hoff, 2005). McCabe (1994) explains that while the push for a globalized education has existed for some time, it is only more recently that institutions and administrators of higher education have found it necessary to move the international aspects of curricula from the domestic classroom into an actual international experience. Abrams (1960) suggests that due to the similarities between the goals of higher education and study abroad, many higher education professionals have come out in support of educational travel experiences. Higher education is supposed to foster intellectual and professional development, personal growth and cultural education (Abrams). All of these goals are reflected in the curricula of study abroad programs, prompting the substantial growth in program offerings in the past 50 years.

Similarly, Carr (2005) argues that there has been a collective realization amongst students that travel, and particularly educational travel can have an immense impact on their personal and professional growth. Carr explains that students, particularly those under 25 have a high predisposition to participate in travel and tourism regardless of the financial consequences. Furthermore, Carlson and Widaman (1988) discuss that
students, as well as academics have begun to realize that study abroad provides them with new and different perspectives on life, potentially impacting their future.

**Study Abroad Outcomes**

Numerous studies over recent years have empirically tested the outcomes of study abroad on the students who participate. One of the most common conclusions is that study abroad programs significantly enhance a student’s ability to see the world through a global perspective and experience cross-cultural understanding (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Dolby, 2004; Hoff, 2005; Ritz, 2011). Extensive research has also suggested many other outcomes from study abroad programs.

Hoff argues that one of the most fundamental outcomes of study abroad is the ability to understand the world from the viewpoint of another. Carlson and Widaman explain that this ability to see various points of view is critical as it allows us to pinpoint what our own culture looks like. They suggest that the ability to define our own culture is essential in order to successfully mediate others, an indispensable skill for the 21st century. Furthermore, Anderson et al. (2006) indicate that study abroad prepares students for interacting with people that have alternate political and personal orientations, furthering the idea that programs encourage students to see the world from many different viewpoints.

Another group of outcomes is centered on students becoming more interactive with the international stage. Research has often found that students returning from international programs are more interested in international affairs, less ethnocentric, and have a higher level of concern for international politics (Carlson & Widaman; Dukes, Lockwood, Oliver, Pezalla & Wilker, 1994; Kitsantas, 2004). Carlson and Widaman
(1988) also indicate that post-program students are frequently more cross-culturally cosmopolitan, giving them a heightened ability to not only be interested in cross-cultural affairs, but also effectively navigate the international stage. Additionally, Kitsantas (2004) found that study abroad significantly contributes to students’ preparation for multiculturalism that is necessary post-graduation. All of these factors indicate extensive international education outcomes produced from study abroad programs.

Outcomes can also be seen on a personal and professional development level. Educational travel has been considered a fundamental springboard for personal growth and development (Dukes et al., 1994). Kitsantas found that programs increase emotional resilience, openness and flexibility to change, and personal autonomy (Kitsantas). Dukes et al. also state that study abroad allows us to capitalize on earlier senses of purpose; it prompts self-reflection, discovery, appraisal and increases levels of self-esteem.

**Program Length**

While there has been a steady increase in number of students studying abroad in the past 16 years, Dwyer (2004) points out that there has simultaneously been a dramatic decrease in the average length of program. According to the Institute of International Education Open Doors Project (2011), in the 2009/10 academic year 56.6% of US students studying abroad were on programs shorter than eight weeks in length, while traditional year programs were only 3.9% of the total. Comparatively, in the 1985/6 academic year 17.7% of students were studying on academic year programs (Dwyer, 2004). Furthermore, the National Association for Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA) Guide to Education for Advisers and Administrators (2002) states short-term
study abroad programs are the fastest growing sector in the international education industry. Considering these trends, Engle and Engle (2003) suggest that academia and the study abroad industry need to reorient their focus from sheer numbers to quality of programming. Short-term programs have frequently been criticized for requiring little input on the behalf of the student and not producing the same cultural outcomes as more in-depth programs as they do not provide adequate time for student attitudes to change (Gadykunst, 1979; Engle & Engle, 2003; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). Medina-Lopez-Portillo explains if short-term programs are becoming the rule instead of the exception, it is necessary to evaluate them as a new entity of their own.

Conventional wisdom in international education has adhered to the ideal that more is better (Dwyer, 2004). There has been considerable skepticism among researchers as to whether short-term programs have the ability to increase cultural sensitivity, change worldviews, and provide personal and professional growth on the same level as long-term programs (Anderson et al., 2006). Engle and Engle suggest that since short-term programs require little linguistic or cultural preparation, they do not remove students from their comfortable environment in the same way that traditional long-term programs do. The authors continue to demonstrate that students in year-long language acquisition programs experience considerably greater gains than students in semester programs. Dwyer supports this idea by stating that students on full year programs achieve outcomes that are more enduring and have a more significant impact even many years post program.

Other criticism of short-term programs suggests that since students are more likely to study abroad if offered a less academically intense study abroad program,
institutions are treating international education as a numbers game, taking students away from the home institution for as little time as possible (Engle & Engle, 2003). In this way institutions will be able to maximize profits from students while still maintaining high percentages of students studying abroad. Criticism of this kind has led to the suggestion that trips that are less than six weeks in length should be titled as field trips not as study abroad as they cannot possibly integrate a truly educational experience into such a travel oriented program (Engle & Engle).

While many believe that an extensive duration is instrumental in achieving outcomes (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004), there has also been considerable argument that short-term, non language based programs can have similar impacts to the more traditional programs (Anderson et al., 2006). Anderson et al. explain, that in a group of participants traveling to England and Ireland, there was a considerable increase in the intercultural sensitivity of the students despite the fact that they only participated in a four week program. Similarly Medina-Lopez-Portillo points out that on programs to Mexico, there was no difference in students’ abilities to grasp cultural complexities between the seven week group and the 16 week group.

Chieffo and Griffiths (2003) continue by indicating that short-term programs can have a significant present and future impact, and be a gateway to greatly improved international awareness despite their brevity. Dwyer (2004) elaborates by stating that short-term programs where they are well-planned and intensive in nature can have a considerable impact on students, especially when they exceed the critical six-week mark. Ritz (2011) points out that some goals such as increasing the social connection between students and professors are just as easily achieved through short-term
programs as they are on those of traditional length. Medina-Lopez Portillo (2004) concurs by stating that whether students participate in a short or long-term program, either way they are often only seeing the proverbial tip of the iceberg when it comes to cultural understanding.

A different perspective on short-term programs has indicated that they may be solely positive in nature considering that they afford students the opportunity to participate in multiple programs across the course of their degree, enabling participants to not only witness the worldview of one other culture, but potentially experience several (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003). Furthermore, Ritz (2011) explains that where short-term programs are intensely and truly pedagogically designed, there is no reason that they cannot have as significant an impact as long-term programs.

Ultimately, there is a lack of consensus in the existing research about the ability of short-term programs to be considered as intellectually, socially and academically valuable as year-long programs. Current criticism centers on the fact that intense academic-year programs are being placed under the same category as a three week “jaunt” with no true educational value (Engle & Engle, 2003). Collectively this indicates that a focus on not only length, but also quality of programming is now necessary.

**Experiential Learning Components**

As previously discussed, experiential learning is a method of education that involves learning by doing, and then reflecting on your experiences to enable knowledge to be fully grounded (Pagano & Roselle, 2009). Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) explain that many believe study abroad to be experiential by nature; however, they go on to suggest that this is in fact not the case. While study abroad by definition usually
involves some form of active learning, this does not necessarily indicate learning is being achieved on an experiential level, some programs do not allow students the critical time for interaction and reflection and simply act as a means for students to gain filler credits (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). Tarrant (2010) explains that in order to be an effective agent for change, experiential elements of study abroad must me extensively prepared for.

Montrose (2002) goes on to explain that currently there is little understanding among study abroad providers and administrators as to exactly what constitutes experiential learning and how it should effectively be applied to improve program structure. While all study abroad has the potential to provide experiential learning, unmonitored study abroad experiences can actually be ‘mis’-educative, based on the idea that no education is neutral (Aguilar & Gingerich). McKeown (2009) explains that vast numbers of current programs lack a critical structure including faculty-student engagement, group discourse, and reflective exercises. Aguilar and Gingerich further this idea by stating that reflection, critical analysis and synthesis are essential elements if programs are to reach their experiential education potential. Tarrant agrees by stating that where programs, even short-term ones, are experientially structured, there is a high propensity that students will achieve a new worldview by the end of the program.

In order to achieve a truly experiential structure a number of different components must be considered. Montrose (2002) suggests that positively experiential programs will have a sound academic agenda, achieved through legitimate grading, applicable course credit and allowing students to have concrete experiences while actively engaging with peers and the community as a whole. Aguilar and Gingerich
detail a more extensive list of requirements in order to achieve structured experiential education. They argue that there must be: 1. Personal integration, 2. Problem-based academic content, 3. Critical analysis and reflection, 4. Collaboration and dialogue with others, 5. Community interaction, 6. Diversity and intercultural communication, 7. Action and social transformation, 8. Mutuality and reciprocity, 9. Facilitation by trained faculty and staff, and, 10. Evaluation and assessment. The authors argue that where students are allowed the opportunity to complete and participate in these phases, experiential learning will have been achieved. In order to achieve this goal it is evident that considerable planning and structure is required.

In instances where traditional classroom learning is unlikely to be effective, such as in second language acquisition, experiential learning as part of a study abroad program can be an incredibly effective method of teaching (Berwick & Whalley, 2000). Montrose (2002) explains that interactions presented in real world situations have a unique ability to challenge prevailing worldviews; additionally the traveling component encourages a personal responsibility for an individual’s learning. These aspects can play a fundamental role in producing the desired outcomes of international education discussed earlier. Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) argue that a key advantage of the study abroad medium is that by its nature presents the opportunity for students to test recently understood concepts on their lived experiences, providing a more grounded method for acquiring knowledge.

Furthermore, Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) discuss the idea that study abroad and experiential education are natural partners, while one does not necessarily indicate the other, they both intend to empower students and embrace the notion of education
being achieved through some kind of social transformation. Considering this seemingly perfect fit and the evident need for structure to be applied to study abroad programs, particularly those that are shorter in length, it seems advantageous to evaluate programs on their ability to be experiential and to identify the outcomes (Pagano & Roselle, 2009; Montrose, 2002; Tarrant, 2010).

**Impact of Cultural Distance**

While modern study abroad programs vary by length, subject and design, the most obvious way in which they are varied is by location. Many universities offer programs on at least five continents and across dozens of countries. Considering the extreme differences in culture that can exist across borders, it is important to consider that the level of change experienced will be different depending on what country a student goes to (Rohrlich, 1991). Ng et al. (2007) define culture as the configuration and result of learned behavior that is shared through a given society.

These learned behaviors are exceptionally varied depending on the country, as well as the ethnic, social and regional group (Klooster, van Wijk, Go, and Rekom, 2008). Ng et al. suggest that tourists experience cultural differences through observance of food, language, cleanliness, pace of life, formality, recreation, etiquette, standard of living, privacy, transportation, intimacy, and humor. Klooster et al. continue to explain that historically culture has been approached from three different perspectives; postmodernist, particularist, and dimensionalist. Dimensionalist researchers are traditionally social scientists and explain cultural variation as emerging from a set of dimensions. Because it is these dimensions that make up the variances, they can
similarly be broken down to allow measurement of differences, ultimately leading to the ability to measure the perceived distance between one culture and another.

Since human perceptions of culture are subjective, the notion of cultural distance has been formed in order to more effectively conceptualize and scale the complexities of culture (Shenkar, 2001). Kogut and Singh (1998) developed an index of culture that allows cultural distance to be measured by the deviance between the score of the home country and the target country. Their index is based on the four dimensions of national culture described by Hofstede (1980). The four dimensions are power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede explains that power distance is measured based on societal acceptance of the unequal distribution of power among institutions and organizations. Individualism is the extent to which a society has loose or closely bound relationships with each other. Masculinity is scaled by the degree to which the dominant values of a society are considered ‘masculine’, for instance how assertive, money-focused and uncaring are the institutions and people. The final dimension is uncertainty avoidance, this is defined by the amount a society, or people within a society feel threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations, where uncertainty avoidance is high, people perceive risk as continually higher.

Kogut and Singh adapted these dimensions to create a measure that could be easily calculated from secondary data, enabling a specific measurement of the differences between two given cultures. In order to calculate the distance, Kogut and Singh created a formula that would calculate the arithmetic average of the variance corrected differences between the host and target country. Scores were able to range from 0 to 17.93, though exact scores on the extremes are exceptionally unlikely. On the
initial calculation of the index one of the lowest scores was 0.02 between the United States and Australia, whereas one of highest was 8.22, between Japan and Sweden.

Since its conceptualization cultural distance has been applied to a number of different areas including international business and tourism. Ng et al. (2007) suggest that within the tourism industry cultural distance has been found to impact intention to visit. Where there is a minimal cultural distance, such as that between Hong Kong natives and mainland China, there is a higher intention to visit. They continue to suggest that many tourists will stick to religious, social, and political lines to ensure that they do not experience too high of a cultural distance. However, it has also been proposed that where tourists visit countries that are highly culturally distant from their own, those tourists are usually highly motivated to get a deeper cultural experience and more fully immerse themselves in the alternative culture. Similarly, those that stay in culturally proximate regions sought superficial entertainment and were more likely to stay in a tourist ‘bubble’ (Cohen, 1972; McKercher & du Cros, 2003).

This application to tourism literature has also enabled cultural distance to be used in the educational travel area of research. Rohrlich (1991) explains that one important area of concern in international education is the psychological distress experienced by students when culture shock occurs. Rohrlich continues to suggest that the cultural distance often accounts for the level of distress experienced by students, where distance is high, students do not have the social skills to appropriately negotiate society (Bhawuk & Breslin, 2000). However, it has been suggested that significant cross-cultural learning cannot occur unless ‘unlearning’ takes place via culture shock and confusion (Klooster et al., 2008). Galtung (1965) adds that where cultural
differences are low, the level of learning is weak, however, if the cultural distance is too high serious culture shock can cause so much stress as to disable learning. Therefore, influential cross-cultural learning experiences are most likely to occur within a certain range of cultural distance. Barkema and Bell (1996) support this through their suggestions that successful learning and adaptation is more likely where students move through incremental culture changes.

Considering the potential impact of cultural distance on intention to visit, culture shock, and ultimately learning, it also seems important to evaluate the impact of cultural distance on the ability for study abroad programs to be transformative.

It is evident from this review that while participation in educational travel is continuing its upward trend, there are also many factors that have the potential to influence the impact study abroad programs have on students. Depending on the program length, academic and experiential content, and cultural distance of the host country, students are likely to experience varying levels of personal, academic and professional outcomes. As such, this study sought to further understand the relationship between these factors and positive outcomes for students.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the transformative learning potential of different types of study abroad programs. An online survey design was used to collect data from college students enrolled in 2012 summer study abroad programs through the University of Florida. The dependent variable was the degree to which participants experienced transformative learning. The independent variables were program length, cultural distance, and experiential learning style.

Data Collection

The researcher made contact with the University of Florida’s International Center (UFIC) in December 2011. For this research a study abroad program advisor was the primary contact. The researcher discussed how the study could be conducted with UF summer study abroad students, and what types of program to include. After discussions with the UFIC advisor regarding recruiting students from specific programs, it was decided to expand the pool to all students studying on UF sponsored programs during the summer of 2012. These programs included faculty-led and exchange programs on six continents, ranging from one-week to one semester in length. The advisor also suggested that given a potential group size of 1200 students, the most effective way to recruit participants would be via an online survey design. In this way students could be easily contacted and more likely to participate in the research.

Prior to the University of Florida’s summer study abroad programs, students are required to attend one of three pre-departure information sessions which were held in April 2012. The researcher attended each of the pre-departure sessions in order to introduce the study and explain the purpose of the research. At this time the students
were instructed as to how they would be contacted by the researcher, when they would be asked to complete a questionnaire, and how they would access the online survey. The researcher explained to the potential participants that participation in the study was voluntary, that any participation would be completely confidential, and they were provided with the researcher’s contact information in case they had any questions or concerns.

After the initial contact at pre-departure sessions, the researcher contacted the student participants via email throughout the summer, reminding them about the study and providing the URL link to the post-trip survey. Due to the geographical dispersion of students during the summer and widespread familiarity with the online environment, an online survey was deemed the most appropriate medium.

According to Schonlau, Fricker, and Elliott (2002), communicating with participants at three stages throughout the data collection process may enhance participation rate in internet-based surveys. Schonlau et al. suggest the use of several contact modes, initiating researcher-participant contact, response mode, and follow-up mode. To enhance the response rate for this study the researcher sent emails to students according to the three-stage model. The first email contained the URL for the questionnaire and was sent at the end of their respective programs in summer 2012. A second email was sent one week after the end of the programs in order to thank participants that had already responded and remind those that had yet to do so. A third email was sent two weeks after students’ return to follow up and thank students for their participation. Due to the variation in length of the programs being used, email addresses provided by UFIC were categorized according to length and return date. In this way the
The researcher was able to stagger the email sending process in order to most accurately meet the different contact phases of the survey process.

Qualtrics was the internet survey host used for the questionnaires. Due to the fact that this study used a closed population of students who were required by the UFIC to maintain some kind of internet access, using an internet-based survey did not prevent students from participating in the study.

Participants

The study population consisted of students participating in study abroad programs sponsored by the University of Florida in the summer semester of 2012. Approximately 950 students were asked to participate from the Summer A, B, and C semesters. The study yielded n=216 responses, indicating a 22.74% response rate, although due to a Qualtrics error the workable sample for most of the analyses was based on n=126. The study used student’s university email addresses which students are required to access frequently, as such there were no known errors of students receiving the questionnaire. As is common with internet surveys this study did experience many non-respondents, as well as dropouts and people who started to take the survey but did not complete it (Crawford, Couper, & Lamias, 2001).

Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of N=216, however due to respondents not completing the entire survey, or potential Qualtrics errors, N=126 respondents failed to answer the many questions in the second and third sections of the questionnaire. Where the valid responses were different than N=216, the total number of valid responses were reported. All percentages reported are in valid percent format.
Of the participants in the sample who provided demographic information 77.8% were females \((n=98)\) (Table 3-1) and 22.2% were males \((n=28)\). In terms of age 72.8% \((n=91)\) were aged 18-21 years, 16% \((n=20)\) were between the ages of 22 and 25, 6.4% \((n=8)\) were aged 26-40, and 4.8% \((n=6)\) were aged 41 and over. Regarding class standing, 1.6% \((n=2)\) were freshman, 14.3% \((n=18)\) were sophomores, 30.2% \((n=38)\) were juniors, 32.5% \((n=41)\) were seniors, and 21.4% \((n=27)\) were graduate students. With regards to ethnicity, 69.8% \((n=88)\) were White/Caucasian, 6.3% \((n=8)\) were Black/African-American, 7.1% \((n=9)\) were Asian, 0.8% \((n=1)\) were Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 13.5% \((n=17)\) were Hispanic/Latino, and 2.4% \((n=3)\) were other/not specified. Regarding nationality, 91.1% \((n=113)\) reported American citizenship, while other countries of nationality included China \(4\%, n=5\), as well as Colombia, Switzerland, Ecuador, Haiti, Italy, Panama, and Finland, all of which represented .8% \((n=1)\). Students were also asked to report their major. Fifty-two different majors were reported with Public Relations being the most common at 9.7% \((n=12)\), closely followed by Economics and Business, both of which represented 8.1% \((n=10)\).

The study abroad programs ranged in length from six days to 180 days \((M=41.79\text{ days}, SD=26.89\text{ days})\). Length of study abroad program was categorized into short \((0-18\text{ days})\), medium \((19-35\text{ days})\), long \((36-49\text{ days})\), and extra-long programs \((50+\text{ days})\). Short programs represented 15.2% \((n=19)\), medium 36% \((n=45)\), long 28.8% \((n=36)\), and extra-long 20% \((n=25)\). These length categories were chosen according to frequency distribution of program length and natural cut points in the data. Participants were first asked if they had travelled internationally prior to this study abroad program, 20% \((n=25, N=125)\) respondents indicated that they had never been
abroad before. While 80% (n=100) had travelled internationally previously, 27.2% (n=34) had only been one or two times, 16% (n=20) had been three or four times, and 36.8% (n=46) had been five or more times. Students were also asked to report what countries they had visited previously. Responses showed a total of 72 countries from Afghanistan to Venezuela. The most frequently visited were the Bahamas (N=20), Canada (N=28), and France (N=23).

Participants were also asked to report their language ability in the native language of their host country. Of N=124, 15.3% (n=19) reported that they spoke the language fluently, 18.5% (n=23) spoke the language conversationally, 24.2% (n=30) spoke a little, and 27.4% did not speak any (n=34).

**Instrument**

The instrument used in this study consisted of a fixed-choice and open-ended response format questionnaire. The questionnaire contained three sections (Appendix A).

Section one used the learning activities survey questionnaire originally developed and validated by King (1998) as used in Brock’s (2010) test of transformative learning. The precursor steps of transformative learning outlined by Mezirow (1997) were operationalized by Brock as follows: Step one ‘a disorienting dilemma’ is measured by the statements “I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act”, or “I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles”. Step two ‘critical reflection of assumptions’ becomes “as I questioned my ideas, I realized I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations” and “or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations”. Step
three ‘recognized discontent shared’ becomes “I realized that other people also questioned their beliefs”. Step four ‘explored new roles’ becomes “I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles”. Step five ‘self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame’ becomes “I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations”. Step six ‘tried on new role’ becomes “I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them”. Step seven ‘planned a course of action’ becomes “I tried to figure out a way to adopt these new ways of acting”. Step eight ‘Acquired knowledge and skills to implement plan’ becomes “I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting”. Step nine ‘built competence and confidence in new role’ becomes “I began to think about reactions and feedback from my new behavior”. And step 10 ‘reintegrated to life’ becomes “I took action and adopted these new ways of acting”. The original 10 steps became a 12 item transformative scale. These items were measured on a yes/no scale (yes=1, no=0), and assessed the transformative learning potential each student experienced.

Section two measured program information. It asked questions such as “In days how long was your program?” and “Which country or countries did you study in?” This allowed for categorization of length as well as cultural distance. Students listed the country(ies) in an open-response format. In turn, the countries were categorized using Lepp and Gibson’s (2008) classification of regions of the world by perceived risk/familiarity and strangeness as a measure of cultural distance. Lepp and Gibson’s geographical regions are classified as follows in ascending order of risk/ increasing cultural distance; 1. USA/Canada, 2. Australasia/Oceania, 3. Western Europe, 4. Caribbean, 5. Eastern Europe, 6. Far East Asia, 7. South America, 8. Central America,
9. South East Asia, 10. Indian Subcontinent, 11. Russian Federation, 12. Africa, 13. Middle East. For this study these groups were further collapsed into four categories. Initially USA/Canada, South East Asia, and Middle East were removed as none of the respondents were studying in these regions. It was then necessary to combine further due to small cell sizes in several of the geographical regions. Ultimately the groups were as follows’ Australasia/Oceania and Western Europe (group one, most culturally similar to the US), Caribbean and Eastern Europe (group two), Far East Asia and South and Central America (group three), and Indian Subcontinent, Russian Federation, and Africa (group four, least culturally similar to the US). These groups were developed in accordance with the perceived risk means reported in Lepp and Gibson’s (2008) research.

Section two also included questions pertaining to experiential learning and program type. Participants were asked to select which class components applied to their program from a list including essays, quizzes, multiple choice exams, debates, and field trips among others. Students were also asked to answer two open-ended questions regarding program components.

Section three measured demographic information. Questions included basic demographics such as gender and class standing. This final section also included open-ended questions regarding previous travel experience and highlights of the programs they had just completed.

Reliability analysis was used to test for internal consistency of the transformative learning scale. The transformative learning components yielded a relatively high Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha=0.80$. This is consistent with King’s (1998) findings of a reliability
of .86 on the learning activities survey. King (2009) states that the instrument’s reliability and validity have been repeatedly confirmed through the use of multiple data sources to confirm analysis, member checks, and independent coding.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 16.0). Descriptive statistics were generated for all the variables and included means, frequencies, percentages and standard deviations. ANOVA was used to analyze differences in transformative learning experiences on three variables; type of program completed, program length, and cultural distance. Nominal level data were summed to measure transformative learning via the 12 dichotomous items, where the answer options were ‘yes=1’ or ‘no=0’.

The open-ended data were subjected to a thematic analysis. This was conducted manually by the researcher. Initially the researcher transferred the data to a word file, then printed and read the responses through to identify initial categories. These categories were further broken down into similar responses, all categories were then cross-referenced. Finally, the researcher evaluated the responses and how applicable they were to dimensions of experiential and transformative learning. Categories of similar responses were reported by theme and sub-theme, as well as research question in chapter four.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Frequency N=126*</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>41+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5+ times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not speak any</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total sample was N=216, only N=126 provided demographic information.
The University of Florida offers more than 60 sponsored programs during the summer sessions each year. Respondents from this study traveled to 33 countries from approximately 40 different programs. Typically UF sponsored programs are led by University of Florida faculty who travel with the students the whole time they are abroad. These programs can last anywhere from one week, to the entire summer semester. Students from all undergraduate and graduate levels participated in these programs, and the program topics include everything from business, to Chinese language, and the pursuit of happiness. All students were required to attend the UFIC pre-departure orientation, but many faculty chose to provide their own orientations. These results show that 81.6% (n=102) of students attended an additional orientation. Their open-ended responses indicate that this additional orientation was anything from a two-hour discussion with alumni, to an extensive group-bonding weekend orientation.

Transformative Learning Components of the Study Abroad Experience

Research Question 1 - Does Transformative Learning Occur on Study Abroad Programs?

To measure transformative learning a 12 item scale was used (Brock, 2010). Students answered yes=1 or no=0 to each item. Item 1 ‘I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act,’ received the most positive responses, 67.1% (n=145) participants responded yes. Item 3 ‘As I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations’ (66.5%, n=139), item 9 ‘I tried to figure out a way to adopt new roles, or new ways of acting’ (65.6%, n=141), item 6 ‘I thought
about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles’ (64.8%, $n=140$), and item 10 ‘I gathered information I needed to adopt new ways of acting’ (65.7%, $n=140$), also received high levels of positive responses. The lowest positive response of 23.3% ($n=50$) was to item 7 ‘I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations’ (Table 4-1). Twenty-nine participants responded yes to 10 of the transformative scale items (13.8%). Only 5 students ($n=2.4\%$) did not respond positively to any of the scale items, 58.1% responded positively to 6 or more items.

Each of the transformative learning scale items was summed to create a total transformative learning score. Each indication of ‘yes’ was added to create a summed score out of 12. The responses ranged from a low score of 0, to a high of 12, there were students who responded either yes or no to all 12 items. The mean score was 6.81 with a standard deviation of 3.17.

**Research Question 2 - Does Transformative Learning Differ by Program Length?**

ANOVA was used to explore differences among more than two groups of program length categories and the transformative learning experienced by the participants. Respondents reported program length in days and these were categorized into four groups (Table 4-2). Short programs comprised 0-18 days (15.2%, $n=19$), medium 19-35 days (36%, $n=45$), long 36-49 days (28.8%, $n=36$), and extra long 50+ days (20%, $n=25$). The groups were categorized according to previous literature and the distribution of the program length variable. The shortest reported length was 6 days; the longest was 180. The mean program length was 41.79 (42) days. The standard deviation was 26.89 days.
As depicted in Table 4-3, a one-way ANOVA showed a statistical significance ($p < .01$) between program length and the summated transformative learning score. A Tukey post hoc analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in transformative learning achieved between the 'short' program group and the medium, long, and extra long groups respectively ($p(\text{all})<.01$). There were no statistical differences between any of the other groups (Table 4-4). The mean transformative learning sum for each group were as follows; short ($M=4.29$, $SD=3.24$), medium ($M=7.09$, $SD=3.12$), long ($M=7.26$, $SD=2.78$), and extra-long ($M=7.92$, $SD=3.19$). The mean transformative learning score for the short program group is significantly lower than that of the medium, long, and extra-long groups, indicating that a higher degree of transformative learning occurred on the medium, long, and extra-long programs in comparison to the shortest programs.

**Research Question 3 - Does Transformative Learning Differ by Degree of Experiential Learning Offered?**

To provide additional information about the nature of their programs, students were asked to indicate which of the 16 learning components they had experienced on their programs (Table 4-5). The learning components included formal quizzes, field quizzes, multiple choice tests, short answer exams, essay exams, open-book exams, debates, group projects, student discussions, field lectures, field trips, presentations, experiments, interaction with the local community as part of the program, interaction with the local community as leisure time, and other. The most frequently selected learning component was field trips ($n=107$, 49.5%), closely followed by presentations ($n=96$, 44.4%). Both interaction with local community as part of the program, and
interaction with local community as leisure time were reported by 37% \((n=80)\). The least frequently selected type of program component was field quizzes \((3.2\%, n=7)\).

A one-way ANOVA was used to investigate the differences between program types and degree of transformative learning experienced. Participants self-reported the type of program into four categories (Table 4-6); traditional classes \((15.1\%, n=19, N=126)\), field or practical \((23\%, n=29)\), combination \((45.2\%, n=57)\), and other \((16.7\%, n=21)\). While by nature all the programs included some experiential elements such as field trips, and the impact of being in another country, these categories show the different degrees of experiential learning that students experienced. Based on the previous literature (McKeown, 2009; Montrose, 2002; Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002) traditional classes with a lecture format show the lowest degree of experiential learning, and the field or practical category represents the highest level of experiential learning components. The other two categories are in-between.

As depicted in Table 4-7, a one-way ANOVA showed no statistical difference \((p=.47)\) among program type and the summated transformative learning score. The mean transformative learning summative scores for each group were as follows; traditional classes \((M=5.94, SD=3.21)\), Combination \((M=7.16, SD=3.25)\), Field or practical \((M=6.7, SD=3.59)\), and other \((M=7.38, SD=2.5)\). While there were no statistically significant findings between the groups, by looking at the mean transformative learning scores it is possible to see that there were incremental differences. Traditional classes received the lowest mean score, followed by the field or practical group, then combination type, with the ‘other’ category showing the highest propensity of transformative learning. In an attempt to reveal further differences the
researcher organized the program characteristics by experiential and non-experiential elements. The data were organized in a variety of ways, though none of them revealed any statistical differences among the various types of academic assignments completed by the students as part of their programs.

**Research Question 4 - Does Transformative Learning Differ by Cultural Distance Experienced?**

Students reported their host country in an open ended question format. The researcher categorized these responses according to Lepp and Gibson’s (2008) categorization of world regions based on perceived risk as an indicator of cultural distance. In reviewing the host countries for the summer 2012 study abroad programs, 1. USA/Canada, 9. South East Asia, and 13. Middle East were removed, there were no participants studying in these locations from UF in the summer of 2012. It was also necessary to combine the groups in order to make more reliable cell sizes. By using Lepp and Gibson’s research as a guide the destination countries reported in this study were re-categorized. Respondents reported their destination countries, which were categorized into the following; Australasia and Western Europe (n=84, 67.2%), this has the lowest cultural distance, Caribbean and Eastern Europe (n=9, 7.2%), Asia, Central and South America (n=24, 19.2%), and Indian Subcontinent, Russian Federation, and Africa (n=8, 6.4%), this group has the highest cultural distance.

An ANOVA revealed there was a statistically significant difference between the cultural distance groups and the summed score from the transformative scale (p<.01). (Table 4-8). A Tukey post hoc analysis (Table 4-9), showed that there was a significant difference in transformative learning achieved between the Caribbean and Eastern
Europe group and the Australasia and Western Europe group ($p<.01$). There was also a significant difference between the Caribbean and Eastern Europe group and the Asia, Central, and South America group ($p=.04$), as well as with the Indian subcontinent, Russian federation, and Africa group ($p=.02$). The mean transformative learning scores for the respective cultural distance groups are as follows; Australasia and Western Europe ($M=7.21$), Caribbean and Eastern Europe ($M=3.00$), Asia, Central, and South America ($M=6.65$), and Indian Subcontinent, Russian Federation, and Africa ($M=8.17$). From these scores it is evident that transformative learning is significantly lower in the Caribbean and Eastern Europe group than it is in the other three groups.

**Open-ended Questions**

Students were also asked a variety of open-ended questions revolving around their transformative learning experiences, the length of their program, and experiential learning aspects. These responses were analyzed in order to give a more in depth evaluation of their experiences and progress while studying abroad. In order to fully evaluate the responses, the researcher conducted a content and thematic analysis. Responses are reported with original spelling and grammar as used by the students.

**Transformative Learning Questions**

According to Brock (2010) a key method of judging whether transformative learning has occurred is to ask students whether they experienced a change in their beliefs or values. In correspondence with this idea, students were asked ‘During your study abroad did you experience a situation that changed your beliefs or values?’ More than 65 students ($N=105$) responded that they had experienced a change in their beliefs or value system. Students’ responses covered themes such as understanding the
United States, changing their value systems and global outlook, career and personal goals, and travel aspirations.

**Understanding the USA**

Approximately half of these students reported that they had come to the realization that there are some things they believe to be wrong with the current US society and their global beliefs. One 19 year old male who studied in Chengdu stated that ‘in the West, particularly our ideas of individualism and liberty are not universal human desires but in many cases can be detrimental to society’. Another student suggested that they realized ‘How wasteful and obsessed the United States is with consumerism – Europeans value their free time and spend it relaxing.’ Students also expressed conflicting ideas about their home country. One student explained that ‘America is truly the best country in the world and communism stunts creativity in massive ways,’ while another ‘learned how ashamed I am of most Americans and what America stands for internationally. I learned that Americans are really pathetic excuses for global citizens.’

Despite these differences, there was a distinct cohesiveness in the idea that they had previously taken the world, and the luxuries they are privy to, for granted. Students made statements such as ‘America is unbelievably privileged and that we take it for granted,’ “to be grateful for everything I have,’ and ‘outside of a western context our concerns seem irrelevant or even laughable when concerned(sic) to the more pressing concerns of economic development.’
**Value system and global outlook**

Sixteen students directly referenced a change in their value system such as one student who explained that studying in Brazil ’relaxed my views on sexuality and gender issues,’ another expressed surprise at some people’s perspective on arranged marriage ‘they have grown up knowing that their parents would choose their future partners. They like this traditional form of finding a spouse. This was a shocking perspective that changed the way I view marriage.’ One student even stated that they ‘used to think socialized health care was a good system until I experienced NHS in the UK.’ Many students also referenced their appreciation for the world around them, as well as the luxuries they did not realize they had ‘back home.’ Some suggested that they realized a constant need for adaptation to new cultures, while others thought the opposite; that they could apply the same methods no matter where they were in the world.

These personal and academic impacts were supported by changes to their global outlook. One 18 year old male stated that he will ‘more carefully and critically observe worldwide news events because what happens on the other side of the world affects each of us,’ another student came to understand that ‘small differences that might not seem important to us where we live, or seem odd are sometimes not even efficient in another country.’

The questionnaire also asked students ‘what was the most important thing you learned about the world on your trip?’ Interestingly most students who responded to this question came out with two conflicting ideas. Many students proclaimed a realization that there is so much diversity in the world and a lot more to see, whereas the others explained that they realized how very similar people are no matter where they are from.
Students expressed such conflicting ideologies as ‘Everyone’s customs and society are very different even if they speak the same language’, and ‘In general people are very similar and we have very similar habits and methods.’

**Increased travel goals**

Students were also asked, ‘Do you think your study abroad experience changed your expectations in life? i.e. for your career, social, or political expectations.’ More than half of the respondents suggested that their experience had made them want to travel more frequently, for longer, and to more places. Approximately 30 students also suggested a realization that their life post-graduation was not limited to the United States. One such student explained that ‘I had never contemplated working abroad. A few weeks abroad has opened my eyes to the enormous opportunity available to those willing to leave home.’

**Academic and personal goals**

Other students focused more on their academic and career goals. Students made statements such as studying abroad ‘strengthened my decision to go into the Navy,’ ‘solidified my original dream of (sic) wanted to be a hard news reporter,’ ‘reach my goals faster so that I can help other people,’ and ‘really helped me determine what kind of law I intend to practice.’ Finally, many students expressed a comprehension that they can follow a different lifestyle. One particular student explained that ‘it made me think that working can be to live. We do not have to live to work’, another explained that ‘I took a course that taught me how to be happy so when it comes to earning a salary I lowered my expectations because money doesn’t make you happy’.
The final transformative based question was ‘do you feel the program impacted your life overall? If it did, how so?’ For this question the majority of students responded with suggestions of how they will improve on a personal or academic level. Many students suggested impacts such as ‘I got better at Chinese,’ ‘the program has inspired me to learn more languages,’ ‘I found a new (career) path which I am greatly interested in and seriously considering,’ and ‘it has caused me to academically and professionally expand my horizons.’ On a more personal level students spoke of impacts like ‘it brought me a lot closer to my mom,’ ‘I have a new faith in my abilities and for that I am very thankful,’ ‘I just matured more and kind of grew into the adult I was going to eventually become,’ and ‘I have a new understanding of what it means to be an individual.’ Some students even referenced an intense impact on their social abilities; students explained that their trip ‘extremely impacted my life. I cried for days – the friends I made and memories made an everlasting impact,’ ‘being with complete strangers challenged me to accept different lifestyles,’ and ‘I have over 90 new best friends.’

Program Length

Students were also asked ‘Do you feel that your study abroad program length was adequate to meet your goals? Please explain.’ While this does not directly answer Research Question 2 ‘Does transformative learning differ according to length?’ It does provide further insight into students’ opinion of the length of the program, how they think it affected their learning, and how they wished it could be different. Approximately two-thirds of students stated that they were happy with the length of their program, with only one student stating that ‘it was a bit long for me because I had such a difficult time
feeling at place (sic).’ Students who were happy with the length of their program made reported that ‘I think 6 weeks is perfect time for the summer,’ ‘my program was short enough (2 weeks) that my language and dialect did not transition completely and so I was able to feel comfortable communicating upon return,’ and ‘I think that 10 weeks is a good amount of time to study abroad. It’s long enough to really get to know the culture of where you’re staying and start to realize what they’re all about. I think any less that 8 weeks would have been futile.’ So while the majority of students were happy with the length of their program, they certainly were not in agreement as to the perfect length.

There were also about a third of the students who suggested that they wish their program had been longer, sentiments such as ‘I feel like a 3 month program was almost a teaser. In part I wish I was here for a longer period of time,’ ‘I think 6 weeks was a very short period of time to be abroad. I feel it went by in a flash, and I wasted time at the beginning,’ and ‘I wish I would’ve done it for more than 2 months because I love it so much, but it’d be tough to miss an entire semester at my university in the United States’ were voiced. Though many students expressed a desire to be there for longer, one 20 year old female who studied in France and Germany suggested that ‘it’s not a matter of the length of time, rather on the experiences had and the bonds formed’ and this was a common theme throughout the comments.

**Experiential Component Questions**

The third research question asks whether transformative learning differs by experiential learning offered, in order to go more in depth into this question students were also asked questions regarding the learning components they experienced on their program. Students were initially asked, ‘When thinking about the components you
selected above, how do you feel the components available to you impacted your learning?' In response to this question students' made comments about the impacts of traditional aspects as well as what they would like to see more of.

**Lack of experiential elements**

Not a single student suggested that the ‘typical’ learning tools such as lectures, quizzes, and multiple choice exams were the most useful aspect of their study abroad. One 20 year old female on the UF in China program stated that ‘I didn’t really learn much from the classes themselves at all but rather from going out and actually communicating with people,’ another student on the same program claimed that ‘most of them were just like a normal class at UF, I would have liked more interaction with the local community as a part of the program as we only had a few occasions in three months that we went out as a group.’ Where experiential elements were missing, the students picked up on this and made statements such as ‘I would have preferred to go on more field trips and interact more with Italians. I think I would have learned better had we gone out and used it, but there wasn’t really a speaking part to the class.’

**Appreciation of experiences**

Approximately half of the responses reported that the field trips and interactions with the community were the most influential aspects of their program. Students made comments like ‘Special tours of public hospitals had the most impact,’ ‘I felt as if I was learning about culture in a fun way. It was educational but not boring. I learned more on this trip that (sic) I have in a long time!’, ‘taking field trips to the EU really helped put the information we learned into perspective,’ ‘the field trips were definitely the most helpful to my learning- actually going out and seeing the watershed was something that can’t
be taught in a classroom,’ and ‘I had a more comprehensive learning experience abroad than I do in Gainesville.’ Even students who did not directly reference the field trips tapped into the positive nature of experiential elements ‘it was good to be able to interact and learn from the classroom discussions which were heavily based on class participation,’ ‘running experiments gave me invaluable experience with hands on chemistry. Seeing how it really is ‘in real life’ was a great opportunity, arguably much better than any class could offer,’ and ‘all of the experiential learning was amazing because all the book knowledge that we had been gaining in a traditional school setting was more or less abandoned, and instead we concentrated on how we as individuals were impacted by our interactions with our peers, local and native Australians, and the land.’

**Future requests**

To expand on the experiential aspects students were also asked ‘Are there any program components listed that were excluded from your program that you feel would have been beneficial to your learning?’ Out of 83 responses only three students outlined a request for more formality/traditional learning such as ‘quizzes would have been beneficial,’ and ‘I wish we had a book for my first class. I like to learn things and go home and read about it.’ Out of the same set of responses, 51 students stated that there was nothing else they felt needed to be added to the program. The rest of the students however did request more field trips and interactive elements. Students made requests such as ‘I feel that we are in the classroom too much (8:30 to 1:00 every day, except an early release Friday) in addition to a 45 minute commute everyday and each day(sic) and homework after school and business classes online. I would like more time
exploring Madrid and learning about the people and culture while I am here and less
time in a classroom,’ ‘there were no officially sanctioned interactions with local
communities as part of the program,’ and ‘more field trips and local immersion would
have been great.’

**Summary**

These results provide insights into the perceptions, transformations, and
experiences of study abroad students at the University of Florida during the summer of
2012. Differences by length of program, program type, and cultural distance were
measured by themselves as well as in relation to the transformative learning achieved.
The quantitative data showed a difference in program length, and one exploratory
indication that cultural distance may play a role in transformative learning. The open-ended questions seemed to show a diversity of experiences. Changes to students’
belief and value systems were reflected in their changed global outlook, appreciation for
what they have, a keener desire to travel and work internationally, and an intensified
academic and professional track. Participants reported various ideal program lengths,
but almost all admired the experiential learning components and requested even more
immersion where it was lacking. Overall, the research questions addressed in this
chapter have been used not to simply validate study abroad as an entity, but to more
concisely understand how it works best, and how it can be improved.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformative learning step #</th>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Frequency 'Yes'</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I tried to figure out a way to adopt new roles, or new ways of acting</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I gathered information I needed to adopt new ways of acting</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I began to think about reactions to my new behavior</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable in them</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I adopted these new ways of thinking and acting</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I realized that other students were also questioning their beliefs</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>As I questioned my ideas I realized I no longer agreed with my beliefs or role expectations</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-2. Frequencies of study abroad program length in days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Length</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short 0-18 days</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium 19-35 days</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long 36-49 days</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Long 50+ days</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-3. One-way ANOVA for difference in transformative learning by program length

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Length (days)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.09</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-Long</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>146.37</td>
<td>48.79</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>0.002</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Within Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1085.63</td>
<td>9.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1231.99</td>
<td>.034</td>
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*Transformative learning total score ranging from 0-12
Table 4-4. Tukey post hoc results for program length

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tukey HSD</th>
<th>Length Category</th>
<th>Length Category</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short (0-18 days)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0.009*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>0.008*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extra Long</td>
<td>0.002*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (19-35 days)</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>0.009*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extra Long</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long (36-49 days)</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>0.008*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extra Long</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Long (50+ days)</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>0.002*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates a significant difference
Table 4-5. Frequencies of learning components experienced by students while on study abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning component</th>
<th>Frequency (N=126)</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Quiz</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Quiz</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short answer exam</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay exam</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open book exam</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group project</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>32.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Discussion</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28.7</td>
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<td>Field lecture</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27.8</td>
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<td>Field Trip</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>49.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>44.4</td>
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<td>Experiment</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with local community as part of program</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with local community as leisure time</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-6. Frequencies for study abroad program type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Frequency N=126</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Classes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field or Practical</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-7. One-way ANOVA results for difference in transformative learning among program types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Classes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>3.21</td>
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<td>Combination</td>
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<td>Field or practical</td>
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<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.47</td>
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<td>117</td>
<td>1207.05</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1233.17</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean scores represent the mean summed transformative learning score. This score can range from 0-12.
Table 4-8. One-way ANOVA results for difference in transformative learning across cultural distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Distance group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australasia and Western Europe</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and Central and South America</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Subcontinent, Russian Federation, and Africa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>125.80</td>
<td>41.93</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1106.19</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1231.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean scores represent the mean summed transformative learning score. This score can range from 0-12.
Table 4-9. Tukey post hoc results from cultural distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tukey HSD</th>
<th>(I) Cultural distance category</th>
<th>(J) Cultural distance category</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australasia &amp; Western Europe</td>
<td>Caribbean &amp; Eastern Europe</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asia, Central, &amp; South America</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian Subcontinent</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean &amp; Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Australasia &amp; Western Europe</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asia, Central, &amp; South America</td>
<td>0.035*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian Subcontinent</td>
<td>0.017*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia, Central, &amp; South America</td>
<td>Australasia &amp; Western Europe</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caribbean &amp; Eastern Europe</td>
<td>0.035*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian Subcontinent</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Subcontinent, Russian Federation, &amp; Africa</td>
<td>Australasia &amp; Western Europe</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caribbean &amp; Eastern Europe</td>
<td>0.017*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asia, Central, &amp; South America</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates a significant difference
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate the transformative learning impact of
different types of study abroad programs. This study specifically examined the influence
of program length, experiential learning, and cultural distance of the destination visited
on transformative learning outcomes. This chapter discusses the findings of the study
as they relate to study abroad participants, and the experiences reported by these
participants. It further draws upon the literature review and theoretical framework to
explain the results of the study and draw conclusions. Implications of the results and
suggestions for further research are also discussed.

Transformative Learning Theory

The 10 steps of perspective transformation were operationalized into a 12 item
scale by King (1998), and then further developed by Brock (2010); almost all of the
participants achieved some level of transformative learning with some reporting that
they had achieved a full perspective transformation. Steps one and nine, to ‘experience
a disorienting dilemma’ and ‘provisionally attempt a new habit of mind’, were
experienced most by the students in this study. The steps where students seemed to
see less change were to ‘explore options for a new perspective’, or ‘self-examination
with feelings of guilt or shame’. While it is assumed that students are being given
adequate experiences to try new things, it is possible that they need more instruction on
how to make positive changes to their perspective when they return to their home
country.

In the definition of transformative learning put forward by Mezirow (1978) it was
suggested that only through reflection, active learning and placing ourselves in an
uncomfortable situation are we able to develop our understanding of the world and others, thereby achieving transformation. Through the open-ended questions, participants showed signs of achieving all three of these basic precursors to transformative learning. A 25 year old female who studied in Costa Rica stated that she was confronted by ideas that were novel and very difficult to deal with, indicating the achievement of being placed in an uncomfortable situation. Similarly, a 20 year old female who studied in the Netherlands suggested that her learning was really hands on and truly working in her field, emphasizing that many students were subjected to active learning through their program. Finally, a 20 year old male who studied in Italy stated that while he did not necessarily change the way he believed about things, but he definitely considered everything. While this does not indicate a change of beliefs or values, to be able to come to the conclusion of what you do believe after considering alternatives seem to indicate an assured amount of reflection.

Other aspects of transformative learning are also supported by participant responses. Mezirow (1997) discusses that in transformative learning educators should act as facilitators, not an authority. One student mentioned that during their class discussions they were only stopped when necessary by the vocabulary teacher, allowing more time for actual student discussion, signifying coherence to transformative style facilitation.

**Program Length**

The recent trends in the American study abroad market showing a conclusive increase in the number of students studying abroad on short-term programs, (Institute of International Education Open Doors Project, 2011) led to a necessity to investigate the
effectiveness of short-term programs when compared to long-term study abroad experiences. In the wake of criticism that short programs do not require the same level of input on the behalf of the student, and do not provide the same cultural and potentially transformative outcomes it became even more necessary that the impact of length was investigated (Gadykunst, 1979; Engle & Engle, 2003; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). Given the proposal by Dwyer (2004) that the 5-week mark in study abroad programs is critical, participants were divided into four program length categories: short, medium, long, and extra-long (0-18, 19-35, 36-50, and 50+ days respectively).

The results showed that there was a statistical difference in transformative learning achieved between the short program group and the medium, long, and extra-long groups. The mean transformative learning scores were significantly higher in the medium, long, and extra-long groups in comparison to the short program group. There were no significant differences between the medium, long, and extra-long groups. So while it is necessary to state that where a program is less than 18 days long, there may be a significantly lower chance of achieving transformative learning, this is a considerably lower program length distinction than previous studies have shown (Engle & Engle, 2003; Dwyer, 2004; Ritz, 2011). Programs less than four or six weeks in length have previously been criticized for lack of academic impact (Engle & Engle, 2003), this study shows that it is only in programs under three weeks in length that transformative learning may be less likely to occur. Additionally, these results show that it may be possible for programs in the three to six week range to have just as great of an impact as those a full semester, or academic year long. Engle and Engle (2003) suggested that programs less than six weeks in length cannot possibly integrate a truly educational
experience. The results of this study seem to show that there is no difference in the transformative educational ability of programs, providing they are more than 18 days in length.

Furthermore, previous literature points to the fact that where short-term programs are well-planned and intensive in nature (Dwyer, 2004), as well as have a positive social connection between students and professors (Ritz, 2011), they can have a similar impact on students as long term programs (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003). From the open-ended data it was possible to see that some of the students encountered intensively reflective programs that incorporated a lot of different learning elements. Similarly, some participants reported an appreciation for traveling with professors, enabling an experience that led to conversations and connections with faculty that would not have happened if it were not for their study abroad program. This signifies a key factor of transformative learning where the professor acts as a guide, not instructor (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002).

Through the analysis of the open-ended question in particular, it is possible to see how students felt the length of their program impacted their experiences. A large proportion of participants reported that they were happy with the length of their program, various students stated that ‘their’ program length was the perfect amount of time; students reported that 10 days, four weeks, six weeks, and 10 weeks was the perfect amount of time. One student suggested that any less than eight weeks would be insufficient, while another thought that three months was a teaser. This gives an indication of the diversity of opinion among students as to the ‘perfect’ amount of time. Given this variety of opinions, and the fact that the data resulted in an insignificant
difference between the medium, long, and extra-long groups, it is possible that as one student mentioned, it is not a matter of the program length, but has more to do with the experiences had and the bonds formed.

**Experiential Learning Components**

As previously discussed, many believe study abroad to be experiential by nature (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). However, since experiential learning involves learning by doing and then reflecting on your experiences to enable complete grounding of knowledge, it does not necessarily follow through that all study abroad programs afford students the opportunity to have a complete experiential process.

This study showed that there were no significant differences on transformative learning among the different types of program. While this may seem conclusive, it is necessary to consider that students self-reported their program type. This method of measurement may have affected the results as there was no clearly defined way to distinguish the varying levels of experiential learning on a given program. Although there was no significant relationship between the type of program/degree of experiential learning received and transformative learning scores, the open-ended responses seem to support the existence of experiential learning components in these study abroad programs, and the impact it had on the students. As stated previously, a majority of respondents indicated that the most influential part of their program was the field trips, interaction with the community, or other experiential learning components. Students explained that they really liked the self-reflection, community interaction, field trip, and writing aspects of the courses, and they were the most valuable educational aspects. These statements are a strong indication that students were not only being given the
opportunity for active learning, but also the ability to reflect on their experiences through essays, and in-depth student-led class discussions. The ability to actively learn, as well as reflect on experiences are the two key elements outlined by Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) that enable experiential learning.

The learning component open-ended questions also suggest that of the students who commented on what they would like to see in the future. Only three of these participants wanted an increased amount of formal learning. Most students thought that their program was complete as it was, with around 30 requesting an increase in cultural immersion, field trips, and other experiential components. Berwick and Whalley (2000) explain that where these components are missing, learning is unlikely to be effective, especially in language learning.

Following on from this, students also made statements that indicated transformative learning stages that may have been accomplished as a result of the experiential learning components. A female who studied in India stated that when she visited religious temples she felt uncomfortable because of her beliefs, and did not know how to react. This exemplifies the experiential learning component of active learning (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). Statements suggesting that students felt uncomfortable and out of place, reflect the transformative learning stage of ‘experiencing a disorienting dilemma’ (Taylor, 1998). From this statement it is possible to see that a relationship may exist between experiential learning components and the achievement of a perspective transformation.
Cultural Distance

One of the most prominent ways for study abroad programs to differ from each other is by location (Rohrlich, 1991). Depending on the country a student chooses, they can expect to experience a significantly different cultural experience (Ng et al., 2007). However, stating that the culture is different does not help clarify the change being experienced between one country and another. In order to combat vague descriptions of difference, Hofstede (1980) quantified four dimensions of culture as power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Kogut and Singh (1988) continued this quantification into a ‘Cultural Distance’ index, enabling a measurement of the difference between the home and destination cultures. However the index is not user friendly, so in order to operationalize cultural distance for this study, Lepp and Gibson’s (2008) classification of geographical areas by perceived risk were used for the respective countries. Perceived risk is largely born out of a fear of unfamiliarity that can be attributed to high cultural distance. Where there is a higher level of perceived risk/unfamiliarity, there is simultaneously a higher cultural distance.

While this was an exploratory variable, the data did show a significant difference between the transformative learning achieved between the Caribbean and Eastern Europe group, and all of the other geographical areas, but not amongst any other group. While it is evident from previous literature that the type of culture, and its distance from the home culture certainly makes an impact on the type of learning achieved on study abroad (Klooster et al., 2008), these data do not show any specific evidence of exactly how it is impacted. Since the group size was small for the Caribbean and Eastern Europe group, and respondents only represented three programs, it is possible that this
significance is more closely related to these specific programs than the cultural distance between the study abroad destinations and the US.

Additionally, the cultural distance experienced by students according to nationality or whether they had previously visited the region was not controlled for and so it is possible that these variables may have had some influence. Perhaps these variables may have interacted with perceived cultural distance, and in turn influenced the level of transformative learning achieved. Thus, cultural distance as a variable requires further investigation within the realm of study abroad.

Summary and Implications

Because students are not only studying abroad in record numbers, but also increasingly studying only on short-term programs instead of traditional semester or academic-year programs, this study addressed the controversial topic of whether these short-term programs can have the same academic, personal, and global implications of their longer counterparts. This study used transformative learning theory and experiential learning theory as conceptual frameworks to measure the relative success of study abroad programs with a range of program lengths run during summer 2012 from a large US public university. In addition to transformative learning and program length, this study also examined the impact of cultural distance and experiential learning components.

The results provided insights into the levels of transformative learning possible within different study abroad programs. Overall, the data concluded that transformative learning does exist within these programs, but to varying degrees. The fact that there was a significant difference between shorter program length and transformative learning
is consistent with the current literature (Ritz, 2011). However, this study showed that there was only a significantly lower level of transformation on programs less than 18 days, whereas previous research which has shown a five week (Dwyer, 2004) or six week minimum (Engle & Engle, 2003). These results combined with the open-ended responses may allow for a branch of discussion suggesting that short-term programs, provided they are more than 18 days long, may have as great of an impact on students as traditional long term study abroad programs.

The findings of this study regarding the existence of experiential learning on study abroad programs are consistent with previous research (Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). However, the ability for experiential learning components to be used directly as tools to encourage perspective transformation and transformative learning as a whole is an area that needs more empirical investigation. The quantitative data showed no discernible differences among program types, this is potentially due to a weakness in the operationalization and as such it is even more pertinent that research in this area be continued. The open-ended data from this study pointed to the fact that students were aware of the different educational elements and how influential they can be on their learning. If the trend of students only going on short-term programs is to continue, it may be useful for study abroad providers to more directly address the type of learning elements they are using, and how to best encourage student transformation.

Regarding cultural distance, there was only a significant difference in level of transformative learning when groups were compared to the Caribbean and Eastern Europe group. As such this finding should be regarded as exploratory and warrants further investigation. The mean transformative learning score for this region was
inconsistently low. Additionally this group had a low number of respondents and variety of programs, all of which could have contributed to the low scores. While it is evident that cultural distance may play a role in the potential for transformative learning to occur, the impact of cultural distance warrants further investigation in order to more fully understand its effects.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

While this study made some progression with regards to combining conceptual frameworks from higher education and tourism literatures, considering the changes within the study abroad industry, as well as the impact it can have on a students’ career and personal lives it is pertinent for research to continue in areas that were inconclusive. In this study the open-ended responses point to diversity in terms of what students believe to be the best length for a study abroad program – ranging from two weeks to more than three months. It is suggested that in order to more fully investigate the impact of program length on a student’s potential transformation, that future researchers investigate the reasons for choosing different lengths of program. It would be beneficial to know whether students are happy with their program length because of the original reasons for their choice, or because of events that occurred once abroad.

Furthermore, given the potential to see a more defined relationship between experiential learning components and transformative learning, it is suggested that a case study approach might better identify the influence of experiential components on transformative learning. For example, by evaluating the syllabi, course schedules, and teaching methods of study abroad programs, there may be more distinct differences in the transformative learning achieved. Furthermore, it is recommended that future
studies get prospective from program directors. This would enable the researcher to understand some of the logistics and issues associated with specific programs, ultimately enabling a more in-depth evaluation, and allowing a triangulation process.

Though transformative learning, experiential learning, cultural distance, and length have all been discussed within the study abroad literature before, this is the first time they have been combined in one study. As more students study abroad, but for shorter timeframes, and with more providers, it seems pertinent to look at as many aspects as possible to ensure the most positive outcome for students.

It is also recommended that future studies examine the interactive effects of these three variables. For example, would a program less than 18 days that is highly experiential be just as effective at encouraging transformative learning as a semester length traditional classroom style program?

**Limitations**

To combat the potential of question wording confounding the data, University of Florida professors, graduate, and undergraduate students reviewed the questionnaire before it was administered to the participants of the study in order to establish content and face validity. Additionally, the researcher provided contact information during the pre-departure sessions, on the instrument, and on each of the invitation and reminder emails so that participants could ask for clarification if they needed to. This system of review and opportunities for questions and concerns hopefully prevented any confusion that participants may have had, but also question wording may always pose a potential problem.
Another possible limitation was regarding timely distribution of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered immediately upon the students’ return. However, due to staggered end dates it is possible that students received their survey email earlier or later than the desired distribution date. Additionally, due to many students returning during summer break, there was a decrease in response rates as students tend to ignore university related emails.

There was also a limitation in the operationalization of the experiential learning variable. During data analysis it became evident that allowing students to self report their program type did not adequately identify the degree of experiential learning in each program. Due to this weakness, the results on the experiential variable were compromised, limiting the usefulness of this variable. In future it might be beneficial to either categorize by analyzing the program syllabi, or provide students a more specific set of descriptions from which to select their type of program.

Due to an unknown error, while the sample as a whole is N=216, many of the data from the second and third sections of the questionnaire are based on only N=126. This includes demographic data as well as program length, program type, and host country responses. This may have compromised the stability of the analysis with some of the independent variables since some of the cell sizes were below the accepted n=30.

A final limitation is regarding the cultural distance variable. Issues such as whether students had previously visited the region and their nationality were not factored into their cultural distance grouping. This may have impacted the ‘true’ cultural distance that students experienced. Furthermore it is necessary to understand that
while it was essential to collapse the groups of geographical regions because of the need for adequate cell sizes, this was less than ideal. More precise and conclusive results may have been found if more levels of cultural distance were possible.

**Delimitations**

A primary delimitation in this study is that only students who were registered to study abroad with the UFIC during summer 2012 were invited to participate. This limited the generalizability of the results to those studying abroad for no more than three months, potentially excluding those who chose to study abroad for a full semester or academic year, as is common during fall and spring semesters.

Additionally, random selection was not used and as such the generalizability of the findings should be executed with caution. It is also possible that results may be delimited to institutions and programs comparable to the University of Florida and specifically the programs studied.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study suggest that participants in a study abroad program are likely to experience at least some degree of transformative learning. The degree to which they may achieve a perspective transformation may be impacted by program length, type, and the cultural distance between the home and host countries. Additionally, when looking at the open-ended responses consistent themes were found in newfound sense of abilities, independence and the option to travel and work abroad more. Students also reported satisfaction with experiential components over traditional teaching styles,
Though it is only possible to draw inferences about studying abroad for less than a semester, this study provided insights on a range of study abroad programs from multiple disciplinary areas, such as transformative learning, experiential learning, and cultural distance. If researchers continue to investigate the impacts of these variables, it may be possible to not only describe study abroad as a positive impact on students’ lives, but also encourage faculty, program designers, international center staff, and outside providers to create the most influential program possible. If as Tarrant (2010) stated, study abroad is now a necessary part of international education, it is consequently necessary to not only bring more people in, but improve the experiences of those already sold on the idea.
APPENDIX A
STUDY ABROAD SURVEY

Section 1: Transformative learning

Below is a list of learning experiences that you may or may not have had while on your study abroad program. Please check whether you feel you did or did not experience each item. There is no right or wrong answer so please answer as honestly as possible.

1. I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act.
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles.
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. As I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations.
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. As I questioned my ideas, I realized I no longer agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. I realized that other people also questioned their beliefs.
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. I tried to figure out a way to adopt these new ways of acting.
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. I began to think about reactions and feedback from my new behavior.
    a. Yes
    b. No
12. I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.
   a. Yes
   b. No

For the following questions please answer in your own words as honestly as possible

13. During your study abroad did you experience a situation that changed your beliefs or values? Please explain

14. Do you think your study abroad experience changed your expectations in life? Please explain.

15. What was the most important thing you learned about the world on your trip?

16. What did you learn about yourself? Please explain.

17. In what ways do you feel the program impacted your life? Please explain.

18. Do you feel that your study abroad program length was adequate to meet your goals? Please explain.

Section 2: Program information

1. Which country or countries did you study in?

2. How many days long was your program? _____
3. Which of the following descriptions best describes your program?

a. I went to a local university 4 or 5 days a week and attended traditional classes of a seminar or lecture style
b. I spent some time at a local university, but my classes were combined with field trips or non-traditional class time
c. The majority of my classes were in the field or practical in nature
d. Other – Please describe

4. From the following list of class components please select which of these you experienced on your program (select all that apply)

a. Essays
b. Formal quizzes
c. Field quizzes
d. Multiple choice exams
e. Short answer exams
f. Essay exams
g. Open-book exams
h. Debates
i. Group projects
j. Student led class discussions
k. Field lectures
l. Field trips
m. Presentations
n. Experiments
o. Other ____________

5. Did the components in your program impact your learning? How?

6. Are there any program components that were excluded that you feel would have been beneficial?

Section 3: Demographic information

1. Are you?
   Male………1
   Female…….. 2

2. What is your class standing?
   Freshman………1
Sophomore……..2  
Junior………….3  
Senior………….4  
Graduate……..5  

3. What is your age? _____  

4. What is your major? ________  

5. Do you speak the native language of the country(ies) you studied in?  
   Yes………….1  
   No…………..2  

6. How many times had you travelled internationally prior to this trip?  
   Never……………..1  
   1-2 times …………2  
   3-4 times…………..3  
   four or more times…….4  

7. If you had previously travelled internationally, what countries had you travelled to?  

________________________________  

8. Was your study abroad program related to your major?  

________________________________  

9. What was your favorite part of your study abroad program?  

________________________________  

10. What was your least favorite part of your study abroad program?  

________________________________  

Thank you for taking the time to help us. Should you have any questions about this questionnaire, please contact Hannah Strange at hstrange@aa.ufl.edu or Dr. Heather Gibson at hgibson@hhp.ufl.edu
E-Mail Contact for survey

Dear UF Study Abroad Students,

I hope that you had a great time on your study abroad program. As you may remember, at the pre-departure meeting my study was announced by UFIC. This study is part of my Masters’ degree and I am writing to ask you to participate in my study by filling out the on-line survey telling me about your experiences with your study abroad program. Filling out the online questionnaire will only take about 10 to 15 minutes of your time.

By clicking on the link listed below you will see the informed consent form for this study. Please read it and keep a copy of the contact information. The questionnaire is posted online and the link for the survey can be found at the end of the informed consent form.

Please fill out the questionnaire by typing in the responses, and then click “done” at the end of the questionnaire. Please only click “done” once otherwise you will submit your questionnaire multiple times.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me Hannah Strange at hestrange1@ufl.edu

As always your help is very much appreciated.

Thanks

Hannah Strange, Master’s student,
Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management

PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW TO ACCESS THE SURVEY
APPENDIX C
UF-IRB INFORMED CONSENT

2012 Study Abroad Survey

UF-IRB Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Please read carefully before participating in this study.

This study is to investigate transformative learning potential among college students studying abroad. The study involves answering a short online questionnaire that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey is voluntary, but your input is extremely important. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers in the survey, so please express your true feelings.

Benefits from this study include a better understanding of what you learned while studying abroad, and how your perspectives may have changed.

Your responses will contribute to a Master’s thesis investigating various aspects of study abroad. Also, the findings of this study may provide UFIC with information about your experiences and behaviors that can be used in the future programming and marketing of their programs.

There is no compensation for completing the survey, but your responses are extremely important. The survey is confidential. Your confidentiality will be protected to the extent provided by law.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right not to answer any questions. There is no penalty for not participating and you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. There are no risks associated with participation in this study.

PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW TO ACCESS THE SURVEY

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact: Hannah Strange

You can also contact my university supervisor Dr. Heather Gibson, Associate Professor, Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management, , Email:

Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this study should be directed to the UFIRB office at , or write to 

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LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hannah Elizabeth Strange was born in 1988 in Reading, England. She attended the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida, where she graduated cum laude in 2011 with a Bachelor of Science in recreation, parks, and tourism. After taking a gap year before university, and studying abroad in Australia and Fiji while at the University of Florida she decided to use the skills she had accumulated while abroad, and her passion for travel to inspire others to get an international education. Subsequently she decided to continue her studies at the University of Florida to focus more on study abroad and tourism. After graduation with a Master of Science degree in recreation, parks, and tourism she plans to work with American students wishing to study abroad.