

A Survey to Describe the Benefits and Barriers of University of Arkansas
Students to Study Abroad

Olivia Caillouet
Graduate Assistant
University of Arkansas
(501)993-1060
occaillo@uark.edu

Catherine 'Katie' Dobbins
Graduate Assistant
University of Arkansas
cedobbin@email.uark.edu

Leslie D. Edgar
Professor and Assistant Dean of Student Programs
Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences
University of Arkansas
AFLS E221 Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479)575-6770
ledgar@uark.edu

Don W. Edgar
Associate Professor
University of Arkansas
Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology Department
AFLS E111 Fayetteville, AR 72701
Phone: (479)575-2037
dedgar@uark.edu

A Survey to Describe the Benefits and Barriers of University of Arkansas Students to Study Abroad

Introduction and Purpose Statement

International Programs (IPs) have grown in popularity and have increased in importance for colleges of agriculture (Graham, 2012). Furthermore, internationalizing curricula has led to increased global competencies, enhanced worldviews, and internalization of different cultural concepts (Dooley, Dooley, & Carranza, 2008). However, The Open Doors Report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs stated that only 2.3% of students who studied abroad were enrolled in an agriculture related program during the 2014/2015 year (Institute of International Education, 2017). Barriers exist for study abroad opportunities and are categorized in external or internal barriers to international involvement (Andreasen, 2003). However, students recognize the benefits of international experiences even though barriers to study abroad participation existed (Chang et al., 2013).

When selecting an IP, students engage in assessing the pros and cons of participating before committing (Estes, Hansen, & Edgar, 2016). These decisions, based on advantages and disadvantages of participation, should be examined by universities to provide opportunities and resources that align with students' interests. Understanding students' perceived barriers and benefits will enable efforts focused on increasing the number of participating students (Danjean, Bunch, & Blackburn, 2016). The Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences (Bumpers College) has worked for five years to increase international education participation to keep up with the University of Arkansas goal of 25% international participation by 2020. Yet, the Bumpers College has maintained about 5% of its student base participating in international experiences.

The conceptual framework of this research was based on college choice theory, which notes three decision-making stages associated with choosing a study abroad program. The stages are: a) the intent to study abroad, b) the search for a program, and c) the selection of and departure for a location (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2008). To tie the theory of college choice theory (conceptually) to the described processes that occur during a study abroad experience (Conner, 2013), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) was utilized to ground the theoretical framework. The following objectives guided this study: 1) describe students' perceived benefits to participating in an IP, and 2) describe students' perceived barriers to participating in an IP.

Methodology

This study used descriptive survey methodology with primarily undergraduate students enrolled in Fall 2017 Bumpers College courses. The survey population consisted of a random stratified sample of courses by academic department (Trochim, 2001). The courses were large-enrollment, required courses by major, and all freshman orientation undergraduate courses in Bumpers College. There were 1,758 surveys collected from students during these classroom visits (Ex. agriculture economics, apparel merchandising, introduction to poultry science, etc.). Students were allowed approximately 10 minutes to complete a paper form instrument and were asked not to complete the survey more than once in the Fall 2017 semester. The survey administration began 23 August 2017, two days after the start of the Fall 2017 semester, and lasted approximately nine weeks with the number of classroom visits varying day-to-day. The

survey was administered to students either before, during, or after a PowerPoint presentation that covered IPs offered by the Bumpers College. Some timing varied depending on the professor's classroom time allotment. Classroom participants ranged from 15 students per classroom to over 250. In general, larger class enrollments had a larger range in college majors than smaller classrooms. Usable data were collected from students using an 11-question, multi-scale survey that was modified from previous research. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Findings

Students classifications ($n = 1758$) were 15.8% freshman, 38.4% sophomores, 33.4% juniors, 8.8% seniors, and 3.6% were either nonresponse or graduate students. Some participants reported they had previously participated in a University of Arkansas IP ($n = 94$, 5.5%), while others had not ($n = 1602$, 94.5%). The majority of students were interested in short-term faculty-led IPs ($n = 1190$, 72.1%), followed by international internship ($n = 760$, 46%), international exchange ($n = 490$, 27.9%), University of Arkansas Rome Center campus ($n = 365$, 22.1%), international independent study ($n = 304$, 18.4%), and international research ($n = 285$, 17.3%). The majority of students wanted to participate in an IP during summer I ($n = 1138$, 69%), followed by summer II ($n = 839$, 47.7%), and spring semester ($n = 483$, 29.3%). Based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree), students reported "cost is too high" ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.10$), being "too busy with school" ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.18$), and "not enough funding" ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.15$) as the most influencing barriers from participating in an IP. Using the same Likert-type scale, students reported an IP being a "life-changing opportunity" ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 0.75$), "sets me apart when applying for job" ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.90$), and an IP provides "opportunity to live/work abroad" ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.95$) as the most influencing benefits. Grand means were determined for benefits and barriers to IP programs. Benefits to IP ($n = 1730$) programs resulted in a grand mean of 4.23 ($SD = 0.71$). For barriers, there were 13 individual statements compressed ($n = 1735$) for a grand mean of 2.60 ($SD = 0.70$).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The majority of students surveyed were interested in short-term faculty-led programs during summer I. Respondents noted they "agreed" with all nine IP benefit statements, except participating in an IP "to experience the local nightlife (clubs, bars, etc.)" ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.22$). Students noted that IPs can have a life-changing impact on them and can help them learn socially and culturally about a host country. However, there was more variability in responses to the 13 IP barriers statements. Respondents noted costs and school commitments as the largest barriers to IP participation. This research supports previous research by Estes and colleagues (2016) noting the pros and cons to studying abroad as reported in benefits and barriers. Understanding students' perceived barriers and benefits will enable universities and colleges to improve efforts focused on increasing the number of participating students (Danjean et al., 2016). Researchers also noted that understanding why students studied abroad should be assessed (Estes et al., 2016). A key concept of learning when viewed through a social cognitive theory lens is students must be able to alter their environment and assign meaning to an experience (Bandura, 1986); however, students cannot begin to do that unless opportunities are afforded to them. Therefore, this study was an important step in understanding students' international experience interests. With shrinking institutional budgets and the desire to serve students in all educational areas, it is important to focus international programming areas on needs and interests. This research will be used to guide the Bumpers College International Programs Office with program development.

References

- Andreasen, R. J. (2003). Barriers to international involvement. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 10(3), 65-69. doi:10.5191/jiaee.2003.10308
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Chang, C., Pratt, O., Bielecki, C., Balinas, M., McGucken, A., Rutherford, T., & Wingenbach, G. (2013). Agriculture students' interests, preferences, barriers and perceived benefits of international educational experiences. *North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Journal (NACTA)*, 97-103. Retrieved from <https://0-search-proquest-com.library.uark.edu/docview/1445180869/fulltextPDF/FBFDB738861A451EPQ/1?accountid=8361>
- Conner, N. W. (2013). *The cultural adaptation process of agricultural and life sciences students on short-term study abroad experiences* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieve from ProQuest UMI Number: 3586469.
- Danjean, S., Bunch, J. C., & Blackburn, J. (2016). Examining the motivations and barriers influencing the decisions of Louisiana State University College of Agriculture freshmen to participate in international experiences. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 22(1), 49-62. doi:10.5191/jiaee.2015.22104
- Dooley, K. E., Dooley, L. M. & Carranza, G. (2008). Beliefs, barriers, and benefits of a faculty abroad experience in Mexico. Proceeding of the 24th annual meeting of the *Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 155-165. Retrieved from <https://www.aiaee.org/attachments/article/713/155.pdf>
- Estes, S., Hansen, M. J., & Edgar, L. D. (2016). University student and faculty needs, barriers, and expectations of international efforts and opportunities: A closer look at one land-grant University's college of agriculture. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 23(1), 109-121. doi:10.5191/jiaee.2016.23103
- Graham, D. (2012). Sustaining agriculture by integrating globalization into the curriculum. Poster presented at the Annual Conference of the *National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA)*. Refereed poster, abstract published in the *NACTA Journal*, 56(1):67.
- Institute of International Education. (2017). Fields of study. Retrieved from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Fields-of-Study>
- Salisbury, M. H., Umbach, P. D., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2009). Going global: Understanding the choice process of the intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 119-143. doi:10.1007/s11162-008-9111-x
- Trochim, W. M. K. (2001). *The research methods knowledge base*. Cincinnati: Atomic Dog.