

**Perceived Barriers and Challenges to Study Abroad Based on Academic Classification and Major Within a College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources**

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### **Introduction/Need for Research**

The Institute of International Education (2018) reported that the field of study with the highest percentage of U.S. students studying abroad was the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field (25.8%). However, within the STEM field, the agricultural discipline had the lowest percentage of students who studied abroad (2.5%). In previous studies (Bunch, Blackburn, DanJean, Stair, & Blanchard, 2015; Chang et al., 2013; Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen, 2010), some of the most reported barriers is the cost of study abroad, the time commitment, and not being aware of programs available that are of interest. Study abroad experiences that may be of most interest to agriculture discipline students are those related to agriculture. Participants in a study pointed out wanting to participate in a study abroad trip related to their major (Schmidt, 2009). In addition, of the undergraduate U.S. students who engaged in study abroad for credit in the most recent academic year, the majority identified as juniors, but only 17.2% in total identified as freshmen and sophomores (Institute of International Education, 2018).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains that people act on their beliefs when performing behaviors. There are three types of considerations, or beliefs, that lead to the intention (Ajzen, 2006). In regard to study abroad, behavioral beliefs include what benefits students perceive when deciding to study abroad, such as how the international experience will relate to their personal or career goals (Goel, Jong, & Schnusenberg, 2010). An example of this would be a student's major's importance at a global scale (Schmidt, 2009). Normative beliefs include the opinion of others regarding study abroad and if the act of study abroad is perceived as normal, especially by those who have a higher influence on the student. If a student's family and peers show value for an international experience like study abroad and perceive it as normal, the student is more likely to engage (Ajzen, 2006). Goel et al. (2010) reported that the majority of U.S. students who study abroad pick their junior or senior year of college to participate, and this may be seen as the normal or appropriate classification level, and there may be control beliefs that influence this. Control beliefs include anything that may help students more easily access study abroad, or factors that may prevent them from participating in an international experience. Some factors include cost, scholarships available, and a country's political situation, among other factors (Goel et al., 2010). The purpose of this study was to determine if there were perceived barriers and challenges, such as those listed above, to study abroad based on undergraduate students' major or academic classification.

### **Methodology**

The population for this study consisted of undergraduate students in a college of agricultural sciences and natural resources (CASNR) at a 4-year university. There were approximately 416 undergraduate students enrolled in CASNR in the spring 2019 semester. The sample size of 201 students was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) small sample techniques. The final sample consisted of participants who completed the questionnaire, which was approximately 56 students. This provided a 27.8% response rate.

A web-based questionnaire was used to assess the challenges to study abroad based on students' starting major and academic classifications. The questionnaire was originally created

by Rieger (n.d.) to assess the willingness of college students to study abroad, and it has since been used to examine motivators and barriers to study abroad (Bunch, Lamm, Israel, & Edwards, 2013; Bunch et al., 2015; DanJean, Bunch, & Blackburn, 2015; Lamm & Harder, 2010). A test for nonresponse error was completed, and there were no statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between respondents' mean scores on the barriers/challenges construct used.

One-way ANOVA tests were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the perceived barriers to study abroad based on the participants' academic classification and major. For academic classification, participants chose from (a) freshman, (b) sophomore, (c) junior, and (d) senior. For major or academic track, students chose from (a) agribusiness, (b) agricultural sciences, (c) agricultural education, (d) horticulture, (e) animal science, (f) wildlife and conservation science, (g) equine studies, or (h) their major resides outside the college of agricultural sciences and natural resources (CASNR). A Likert-type question asked students to indicate how big of a preventing factor to study abroad each reason to not participate listed was, with the scale being 1=Not a Reason; 2=Minor Reason; 3=Major Reason.

### **Results/Findings**

There were no statistically significant differences in the perceived barriers or challenges to study abroad based on the participants' academic classification. Based on means, the researchers found that students of all academic classifications indicated similar preventing factors to study abroad. However, in regard to the item, "No interest in traveling outside USA," freshman ( $M=1.00$ ,  $SD=.000$ ) and sophomore ( $M=1.00$ ,  $SD=.000$ ) students' means were lower compared to juniors ( $M=1.39$ ,  $SD=.502$ ) and seniors ( $M=1.20$ ,  $SD=.632$ ). There were also no statistically significant differences in the perceived barriers or challenges to study abroad based on the participants' major or academic track.

### **Conclusions**

There were no statistically significant differences in the barriers and challenges perceived to study abroad based on the participants' academic classification and majors. However, it should be noted that even though juniors and seniors are typically the students who study abroad, freshmen and sophomores are interested as well. Students of freshman and sophomore classification indicated similar means in the preventing factors to study abroad, such as cost and time, but indicated a higher interest in traveling outside the U.S. Even if they do not participate in an international experience until their junior or senior year, undergraduate students should be exposed to the idea of studying abroad as early as possible.

### **Recommendations**

This study could be repeated with other institutions considering or interested in assessing student interest in study abroad. This could give a clearer understanding of whether there are differences in the perceived challenges to study abroad based on classification and major. If there are, then further research can be conducted with the goal of exposing students to international experiences at the most essential time of their academic career or relating to the most appealing subjects. This would all be in an effort to increase the agriculture disciplines' participation in study abroad.

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