

**Investigating Multicultural Experiences: A Study of College of Agriculture Students'
Intentions to Study Abroad**

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Introduction

Efforts to internationalize the college experience have gained momentum across the higher education landscape, particularly in developing and promoting education abroad (Roberts et al., 2020). Post-secondary agriculture students who participate in study abroad experiences can explore agricultural industries, engage in agricultural tourism, and participate in service-learning projects (O'Malley et al., 2019). Bobbitt and Akers (2013) found that peer encouragement and personal intentions were influential factors in the decision to study abroad; however, researchers have also identified personal and financial barriers as challenges to participation (Bunch et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2020). Study abroad programs affiliated with colleges and universities worldwide work to develop cultural awareness in students and prepare them to grow academically and personally (Bobbitt & Akers, 2013). Despite recognizing study abroad experiences as a tool for increasing cultural awareness in agriculture students, a need exists to better understand the role of multicultural experience as a motivating factor to participate (Pigg et al., 2021).

The purpose of this study was to examine Herbert College of Agriculture (HCA) students' multicultural experiences in comparison to their intention to participate in study-abroad experiences, which aligns with the AAAE Research Values (2023) related to examining social dynamics in human and life sciences. Our research sought to complete three objectives:

1. Describe the demographic characteristics of respondents.
2. Describe the multicultural experience and multicultural desire of respondents.
3. Determine if a difference existed in multicultural experience and multicultural desire based on students' intention to study abroad.

Theoretical Framework

We utilized Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) as the underlying theoretical framework for this study. The TPB proposes three independent determinants influencing one's intention to engage in a behavior: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, we held behaviors and intentions related to participation in study-abroad experiences in comparison to attitudes toward other cultures, subjective norms related to engaging with cultures outside of one's own, and behavioral controls in the form of effort to engage with other cultures.

Methodology

We collected data for this study during the Spring 2023 semester using an instrument that included the Multicultural Experience Questionnaire (Narvaez et al., 2021) and demographic questions. Narvaez and Hill (2010) developed the MEQ for use with college students and adults and contains two subscales. The first subscale measures multicultural experience related to interactions a person may have had with cultures other than their own. The second subscale represents multicultural desire, a person's effort to increase their multicultural experiences (Narvaez et al., 2021). Using the tailored design method (Dillman et al., 2014), we emailed a brief description of the study and a link to the instrument to 549 HCA freshman and sophomore students, followed by two reminder emails. We chose underclassmen as the population frame of this study due to the reduced impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to study abroad compared to their older counterparts. When data collection ended, 67 students provided usable responses, constituting a 12.2% response rate. To address non-response bias, we compared the

demographic characteristics of respondents to those recorded by the college. A noticeably higher percentage of female respondents were present than represented in the HCA data; however, the race and ethnicity demographics of respondents were similar. Based on this comparison, we advise caution in generalizing the results of this study beyond its participants.

Findings

The largest group of respondents were white ($f = 46$; 68.7%) female ($f = 44$; 65.7%) students, with a close split between freshmen ($f = 30$; 44.8%) and sophomores ($f = 37$; 55.2%). Students pursuing a degree in Animal Science ($f = 20$; 29.9%) constituted the largest major represented, aligning with College data. Few respondents reported participation in a study abroad experience ($f = 7$; 10.4%); however, the vast majority who had not previously participated expressed an intention to do so ($f = 52$; 77.6%). Respondents most frequently reported that their interest in study abroad experiences stemmed from a desire for personal growth, career experience, and impact. Students who had not and did not intend to study abroad listed time constraints, cost, and personal concerns related to travel as their most frequent discouraging factors. The findings related to the MEQ are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

<i>Have you or do you intend to study abroad?</i>	Multicultural Experience Score ^a		Multicultural Desire Score ^b		Total MEQ Score ^c	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Yes ($n = 54$)	22.4	5.29	25.7	3.28	48.1	6.87
No ($n = 6$)	23.0	6.42	26.0	2.00	49.0	8.20

^a True limits for Multicultural Experience are 13 to 38. ^b True limits for Multicultural Desire are 6 to 32. ^c True limits for Total MEQ Score are 19 to 70.

Although the average scores for Multicultural Experience, Multicultural Desire, and the total MEQ score were slightly higher for the group with no intention to study abroad, an independent samples t-test revealed that these differences were not significantly different from the students who had or intended to study abroad.

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

The respondents in this study had average scores indicating moderate multicultural experience, regardless of their intention to participate in a study abroad program. This finding raises questions about multiculturalism as a motivator for study abroad experiences. The respondents' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior controls in this study aligned with related literature (Bunch et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2020). However, a primary limitation of this study was the low response rate. We recommend replicating this study with additional measures to promote a higher response rate, bolstering the statistical power of any subsequent analysis. Additionally, we recommend a pretest/posttest design study of postsecondary agriculture students who participate in study abroad experiences using the MEQ due to its documented aptitude for measuring individuals' multicultural experience and ease of administration (Narvaez et al., 2021).

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