Gauging the Impact of Studying Abroad On Academic Success

Serge Herzog, PhD
Director, Institutional Analysis
University of Nevada, Reno
Reno, NV 89557
Serge@unr.edu

University of Nevada, Reno
Bachelor Degree Recipients, 2000-2010 (N=19,045)

Number of Graduates

- No Study Abroad
- Studied Abroad
- Attempted to Study Abroad

10,784,36
9:1
2,713,372
}

NAFSA Region XII Conference
Reno, NV 25-29 October 2010
Profile of Study Abroad Graduates
Bachelor Degree Recipients, 2000-2010 (N=1,837)

Number of Graduates

- 607, 33%
- 1230, 67%

More female than non-study abroad population

Ethnicity/Race (N, %)

- Whites: 1455, 79%
- Unknown: 151, 8%
- Hispanics: 73, 4%
- Asians: 12, 1%
- Foreign: 18, 1%
- Blacks: 112, 6%
- Native Am: 16, 1%

Slightly more white than non-study abroad population
Profile of Study Abroad Graduates
Bachelor Degree Recipients, 2000-2010 (N=1,837)

Residency (N, %)

- Washoe NV: 946, 51%
- Clark NV: 119, 6%
- Carson NV: 104, 6%
- Douglas NV: 147, 8%
- Other NV: 18, 1%
- California: 138, 8%
- Other US: 148, 8%
- Foreign: 114, 6%

Reflects non-study abroad population

Profile of Study Abroad Graduates
Bachelor Degree Recipients, 2000-2010 (N=1,837)

Academic Major by Department (N, %)

- Foreign Lang: 875, 48%
- Journalism: 223, 12%
- Political Sci: 148, 8%
- Psychology: 150, 8%
- Manag Sci: 125, 7%
- English: 82, 5%
- Business Adm: 134, 7%
- All Others: 100, 5%

% in non-study abroad pop.: 0.8, 0.7, 0.5, 10, 3, 5, 4 top to bottom
Profile of Study Abroad Experience
Bachelor Degree Recipients, 2000-2010 (N=1,837)

- Average length of stay: 4 months
- Average course load: 15 credits
- Average study abroad GPA: 3.36
- Average change in GPA after returning from study abroad: 0.03
- Average change in GPA prior to study abroad: 0
- Average change in GPA after study abroad up to graduation: 0.03
- Most popular study abroad courses: foreign languages (73%)
Study Abroad Students in Comparison
Grade Point Average

- High School
- First Year
- Final
- Capstone

Study Abroad (SA) Status
- SA Attempt
- SA Completed
- No SA

*Excluding transfer-in students

Study Abroad Students in Comparison
Grade Point Average

- Arts Core
- NatSci Core
- Diversity
- English
- Math

Study Abroad (SA) Status
- SA Attempt
- SA Completed
- No SA

*Excluding transfer-in students
Study Abroad Students in Comparison

ACT Test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Abroad (SA) Status</th>
<th>Composite</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No SA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Attempt</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Completed</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excluding transfer-in students

Study Abroad Students in Comparison

% Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Abroad (SA) Status</th>
<th>Changed Major</th>
<th>Double Major</th>
<th>Lived on campus</th>
<th>Used Athletics</th>
<th>On Probation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No SA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Attempt</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Completed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excluding transfer-in students
Study Abroad Students in Comparison
Financial Aid Profile (constant 2007-)

**Total $ Received**
- SA Attempt (74%)
- SA Completed (64%)
- No SA (62%)

*Excluding transfer-in students*

Study Abroad Attempt Students
Financial Aid Profile (constant 2007-)

**Total $ Received**
- Financial (N=7-28)
- Other (N=18-212)

Reason for not studying abroad
Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
Correlation Models*

- Time to degree completion
- GPA trend: first-year to final year
- GPA in capstone courses
- Graduating GPA
- Self-selection control: study-abroad attempters
- Covariate controls
  - Academic preparation (HS GPA, test scores)
  - Student age, gender, ethnicity/race, residency
  - Average annual remaining need ($), FAFSA filer
  - Academic experience (change in major, double major, honors courses, math credits, upper-div science credits, independent study, internships, courses repeated)

*Excluding transfer-in students
Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
Sequential Influence of Time-Dependent Factors

Student demographics
Pre-college academic preparation

Pre-college financial burden
College academic experience and study abroad (SA)

Post-SA college experience

Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
From Descriptive to Inferential Findings

Covariate Factors
- Precollege background
- College experiences, etc

Self-selection Bias
- Study abroad ‘attempt’ students vs. those that did go abroad

No Covariate Controls
No Self-Selection Control

No Covariate Controls
Self-Selection Control

Covariate Controls
No Self-Selection Control

Covariate Controls
Self-Selection Control
Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
Time to Degree Completion

Without controlling for self-selection and other influences, study abroad students finish one semester faster. However, that advantage disappears after taking into account other influences and self-selection bias.

Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
GPA at Graduation

Study abroad students on average have a GPA at graduation that is 0.07 grades higher than non-study abroad students net of self-selection and covariate effects. Controlling for only self-selection bias would overestimate the study abroad effect; conversely, the effect would be underestimated with covariate controls only.
Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
GPA for Capstone Courses

Study abroad students’ GPA in capstone courses is not significantly different from students who never went abroad to study. This lack of difference is observed only after taking into account self-selection bias and the influence of other student and college factors.

Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
GPA Trend from First Year to Graduation

Study abroad students appear to experience a slightly greater rise in GPA over time compared to other students. However, this seeming effect disappears after controlling for self-selection bias.
Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
Time to Graduation, Foreign Language Students

Study abroad students that take foreign languages finish more than one year faster. Still, this seeming effect vanishes after controlling for self-selection bias. No significant results for other outcomes.

Profile of Study Abroad Students
Summary of Findings

- Study abroad students are more likely female and white compared to those that do not study abroad
- The residency status of study abroad students mirrors that of other students
- Foreign language, journalism, and political science students are most likely to study abroad
- Over half of all study abroad students go to 3 countries--Spain, Costa Rica, and Italy
- Three out of 4 take foreign languages while abroad
Profile of Study Abroad Students
Summary of Findings

- Study abroad students enter college academically better prepared
- Study abroad students have higher academic grades, start to finish, compared to their peers that stay at home
- Study abroad students are more likely to graduate with a double-major, to live on campus, and to use athletic facilities
- Study abroad students are more likely to take internships, independent studies, and honors courses

Profile of Study Abroad Students
Summary of Findings

- Study abroad students accumulate more unsubsidized loan debt, but face similar unmet financial need
- Students that attempted to study abroad, but failed to go due to financial reasons, face higher unmet financial need and receive less need-based aid than those who cited other reasons for not going abroad
Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
Summary of Findings

- Study abroad has a **positive** effect on academic grades at time of graduation
- No other significant effects are observed *net of* self-selection bias and covariate controls
- Omission of statistical controls for self-selection bias and other pre-college and college factors may yield significant results that are spurious

---

Estimating the Effects of Study Abroad
The GLOSSARI Project

- Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI) findings:
  - Higher grades, graduation rates upon return
- Glossari control group: “students persisting to the same point in college” (i.e. class level)
- What about student motivation to study abroad?
- Statistical control(s) to account for student self-selection to study abroad is key in gauging the effect of study abroad!