

## ABSTRACT

PEACOCK, JESSICA IVY. Corporate Recruiters' Perceived Value of Study Abroad and International Travel Experiences. (Under the Direction of Gene Brothers.)

The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive listing of the character traits and personal gains students who participate in study abroad have claimed to acquire from international trips abroad (from secondary data sources) and to determine whether these are congruent with the desires of corporate recruiters and hiring managers. This study was also used to determine if and how corporate criteria is used to evaluate study abroad/international travel experiences during the resume portion of interviews. Conclusions were made from the results of personal interviews regarding the themes which emerge about travel/study abroad and employability. This study contributed to a general understanding of company interviewing procedures and the role study abroad and international travel experiences associated with studying abroad during interviews. Recommendations were made based on interaction between human resource directors, hiring managers and campus recruiters during the interview process of this study.

**CORPORATE RECRUITERS' PERCEIVED VALUE OF STUDY ABROAD AND  
INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES**

by  
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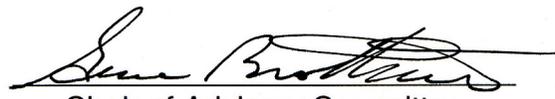
**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION, AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT**

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**APPROVED BY:**

  
A horizontal line is drawn across the page, with two handwritten signatures written above it. The signatures are in cursive and appear to be 'B. E. W. Wilson' and 'L. D. Guther'.

  
A handwritten signature in cursive is written above the text 'Chair of Advisory Committee'.

Chair of Advisory Committee

## BIOGRAPHY

A Raleigh native, Ivy Peacock attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill after high school graduation at Needham Broughton High School in 1998. In 2002 after graduating from the Journalism School with a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Mass Communication, Ivy entered the world of tourism as an employee for the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce. After marketing and advertising work with the chamber Ivy took a position in Raleigh with the Hilton Corporation. While employed by the Hilton, Ivy began taking classes at North Carolina State University in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management. Working full time and taking classes part time soon became a thing of the past and Ivy left her career with the Hilton to attend school full time in pursuit of her Master of Science degree. In her semesters at North Carolina State Ivy worked with the North Carolina Department of Tourism, Film and Sport Development.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Study abroad and the international travel experiences associated with it are important topics to educational institutions, local governments and international organizations dedicated to broadening students' horizons. This study explores the use of experiential education in study abroad programs and relates it to employers' perceptions of the value of these experiences. Today, students are searching for that 'competitive edge' of "What makes me stand out in a sea of qualified applicants?" What experiences can put resumes at the top of the stack and what personal characteristics are being defined as necessary for a job offer to be extended? What are companies and corporations looking for in an applicant? And as a potential applicant, what preparation is needed to ensure the wants and needs of companies are met with the right qualifications.

After the tragedy of September 11, 2001 the world became a different place. The daily outlook on life was different for those living in the United States – and also for citizens of countries all over the world. Governments, schools, churches and corporations realized the critical need for cultural awareness and the importance of globalization. President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell have repeatedly spoken about the value of Americans' studying in other countries. The President spoke out very forcefully on this topic soon after September 11, 2001, when he said, "By studying foreign cultures and languages and living abroad, we gain a better understanding of the many similarities that we share and learn to respect our differences. The relationships

that are formed between individuals from different countries as part of international education programs and exchanges can also foster goodwill that develops into vibrant, mutually beneficial partnerships among nations.” (Bush cited in Greisberg & Johnson 2004, p. 5).

At the center of the race for cultural awareness and global mindedness lies one specific avenue, higher education. Study abroad programs and international travel programs offered by public and private colleges and universities provide a direct connection for students to experience and learn about foreign cultures and societies worldwide. Character traits gained from these experiences have the potential to impact students personally and professionally. National organizations like the Institute for International Education (IIE) feel that it is imperative to determine if studying abroad and the international travel experiences associated with it provide students with character traits companies and corporations are searching for in future employees. It is equally important to determine if corporations realize the personal growth and development students gain from study abroad experiences that could ultimately impact a recruiter or human resource manager’s decision to hire them.

Not only is the international educational component a factor, but the learning style also plays a pivotal role. This educational approach is referred to as experiential learning and will be discussed in this thesis. Also, study abroad as experiential education and how the learning process differs from traditional classroom techniques will be reviewed. In Chapter Two the assessment of this type of learning style and the benefits and drawbacks will be described.

Personal growth and character traits gained from international experiences and the experiential education process will be a component of this study.

The sample for this study will be comprised of human resource directors, recruiters and hiring managers for corporations and companies located in Research Triangle Park (RTP) and surrounding areas of North Carolina. The area located between Duke University found in Durham, NC, North Carolina State University with roots in Raleigh, NC and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is familiar to outsiders today as, the Research Triangle Park. Today the Park encompasses over 7,000 acres of pine forest and has approximately 1,100 acres left for development. There are over 100 research and development companies that employ over 38,500 North Carolina triangle residents. Employment recruitment criteria and interview questions related to international experience and study abroad experience will be addressed.

Results from this study are important for future marketing and funding of study abroad and international travel programs. Also, if there is a connection between studying abroad and character traits companies are looking for in potential employees, study abroad related questions need to be implemented into the interview phases of hiring. If there is a positive relationship between the attributes of students who study abroad and attributes companies are seeking in future employees, hiring management needs to be informed of this so that recruitment and hiring policies reflect this relationship. Finally, this study contributed to a general understanding of company interviewing procedures and the role study abroad and international travel experience associated with studying abroad did or did not play during interviews.

If conclusions can be made from this study reflecting the positive connection between study abroad and the ideal employee character traits, it is possible study abroad programs can gain stronger leverage to market themselves. The results could also indicate the potential for corporate awareness about the benefits of hiring a graduate with study abroad experience. Currently, university study abroad offices make suggestions and references to the benefits of study abroad and the weight it can add to a resume, but, there are no definitive studies that specifically address corporations' views. School websites like San Francisco State University, Elon University and University of Wisconsin, make claims that studying abroad is a resume builder (<http://www.sfsu.edu/~studyabr/faqs.htm>, <http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu/basics/why.html>, [http://www.elon.edu/e\\_web/academics/cannon/studyabroad/](http://www.elon.edu/e_web/academics/cannon/studyabroad/)). Harvard University even requires that all incoming freshman have valid passports for international travel purposes. If colleges and universities are stressing the importance of studying internationally, and the President of the United States is including global awareness as part of his political platform, whether corporations place any value on this type of experience needs to be determined.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1. To develop a comprehensive listing of the character traits and personal gains students who participate in study abroad have claimed to acquire from international trips abroad (from secondary data sources) and to determine whether these are congruent with the desires of corporate recruiters/hiring managers.*

2. *To determine if and how corporate criteria is used to evaluate study abroad/international travel experiences on resumes and during interviews.*
3. *To develop conclusions from the results of personal interviews regarding the themes which emerge about travel/study abroad and employability.*

## ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

This thesis is organized into five chapters beginning with this introduction. The introduction chapter describes the research problem, purpose of the research and the objectives of this research. The second chapter reviews the scholarly literature and describes statistics and studies reviewing current information and research on a combination of topics revolving around study abroad and corporate hiring practices. It is organized into sub-topics including the history of study abroad, globalization and the United States, experiential learning approaches, personal development resulting from study abroad, career development, and hiring processes and corporate recruitment. In the third chapter the study methodology and procedures are described. Data collection techniques, data analysis procedures and methods are explained. The fourth chapter consists of a discussion of results and findings with suggestions for future applications. The final chapter discusses recommendations based on the results and findings.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of a review of the relevant literature including the history of study abroad, study abroad statistics and current research, experiential learning, student character traits, and the corporate hiring and recruitment process literature.

#### **STUDY ABROAD HISTORY/FOUNDATION**

Students on college campuses all across the United States are incorporating study abroad into their curriculum. Those attending private colleges as well as public universities are choosing to study abroad for varying lengths of time that include 4 week to 1 year sessions. However, the concept of studying abroad has changed for many students as social norms change (Arenson 2003). The Institute for International Education of Students conducted a survey about the study abroad experience and found students realize studying abroad is no longer a European vacation or a break from class work. "The study revealed that the study-abroad experience is far more than an exotic spring break from the rigors of academia" (Boston Herald 2003, p. C1). Instead, students are traveling to locations all over the world conducting field trials, participating in foreign languages and immersing themselves in diverse cultures and challenges.

"Experiential overseas learning dates back at least as far as when young Romans traveled to Athens to study at the feet of the great philosophers and

rhetoric; it also enjoys a distinguished history in both Western and non-Western societies” (Cluett 2002, p. 17). In Western cultures the forerunner of the Study Abroad Program is the Grand Tour of the Renaissance period, of course, only the privileged and affluent males could participate in this experience. Typically, those who had the wealth and support were members of English nobility.

Royalty would send their young men from England most often to Florence, Italy and France for a three year period. Once there, the young men were immersed in languages and cultures indigenous to those specific areas. These countries especially, were deemed sophisticated and where renaissance was thought to be flourishing at the time. The objective was to have the English royalty study their progeny in the languages and cultures of the selected destination they called home for several years (Hudman 1990, p. 41).

“People have been crossing borders for educational purposes since antiquity; no journal article can do justice to the range and variety of human experience and political contexts represented by all such movements. But a number of widely disparate episodes may prove instructive. In the late Roman republic, an ambitious young lawyer traveled to Greece and Asia Minor to study public speaking; at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a Russian Czar sought the technical expertise to build a navy; and late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese court established expertise to build a navy; and late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese court established and then terminated an educational mission to the New World. These “case studies” offer important insights into the diplomatic, political and strategic concerns that facilitate, sponsor, and shape the study abroad experience” (Cluett 2002, p. 20).

With the expansion of world markets and the increased accessibility of exotic locales more attention was centered on global mobility. Due to this easy accessibility with the development and influx of air travel there was an increase in both business and leisure travel. Travel to international markets for both

personal and professional purposes contributed to the increase in the expansion of travel for educational purposes. Accessibility to foreign destinations was one of several driving forces in international travel. Also, “A perceived relaxation of international tensions in the wake of the Cold War, and a popular celebration in the West of the triumph of liberal democracy, both sparked an interest in learning about the global marketplace and acted as a catalyst for the various bilateral and multilateral agreements which provided the legal framework for the increased movements of peoples” (Cluett 2002, p. 18).

Despite the resulting increase in accessibility to travel after the Cold War, the U.S. government refrained from overtly participating in any expansion of international travel. “Among the reasons for its lack of involvement include the American traditions of isolationism, limited government, education as a local concern, and the State Department’s distance from the public at large” (Dubois 1995, p. 1). The Boxer Rebellion in China was the catalyst for the first official educational exchange for the national government of the United States. Hundreds of foreigners were massacred by the Boxers in attempt to suppress any outside influence in the early 1900s. The United States, one of several nations, were awarded indemnities which included approximately \$24 million to compensate families of the deceased. Portions of this money were applied to overseas study in an attempt to promote the importance of international travel and to emphasize the need for global diversity (Dubois 1995).

Unfortunately, another War for the United States proved to be beneficial for international study as well. The Belgian-American Educational Foundation formed after World War I as a result of the liquidation of the WWI Belgian relief

funds and at the end of the Second World War more than seven hundred Belgian and American students participated in exchanges. After such a positive experience Herbert Hoover felt there were no other countries where an exchange between students would be as mutually beneficial as between the United States and Belgium. Hoover quipped in reference to Belgium, “Where the ideals and purposes of the American people are so well understood and so respected as they are in Belgium” (Dubois 1995).

A boom in higher education occurred after the Second World War and several other reasons are believed to have been contributors. In an increasingly industrialized and commercialized culture the need for higher education was thought to be crucial in the development of a more modern society. Government initiatives including the G.I. Bill of Rights led to the possibility and realization of postsecondary education to a broader demographic of Americans. In the late 1940s, only 3 million students attended institutions of higher learning worldwide, compared with the current figure approximately 48 million (Dubois 1995).

The tumultuous history of war in the United States did not bode well for study abroad programs. While there were great strides made in international exchange programs after two world wars, the Vietnam War left a very tainted image of international study and travel. It wasn't necessarily the exchange between cultures; the issue was the vast amount of civil unrest across U.S. college campuses.

The 1960s and 1970s proved to be a time where many administrators on college campuses were more interested in maintaining stability and disbanding public protest movements than promoting international exposure and trips abroad

(Dubois 1995). Fortunately for international exchange programs the end of the Vietnam War served as an invitation for colleges and universities to once again emphasize and promote global awareness and foreign travel. While interest among educators and students appeared to be growing, in the early to mid-80's there was little to no reliable statistical data to support this (Burns and Briggs 1985). Clark Kerr, a University of California-system scholar and an advocate for education abroad believes the fact that the flow of students, scholars, and information over national boundaries has reached an all-time high is an indicator that the importance of international exposure is being realized (Dubois 1995).

## **STUDY ABROAD STATISTICS/STUDIES**

The Institute of International Education (IIE) reported an increase of 61 percent between 1995 to 2000 of American students studying abroad. Overall foreign study increased 11 percent 1998-1999 to 1999-2000. To date there are approximately 144,000 American students are participating in an "official" program studying abroad (Yates 2002).

A more recent study, IIE's annual report Open Doors, reported participation in study abroad programs in the last fifteen years has grown among American students (2003). The institute found 160,920 U.S. students studied abroad for credit during the 2001-2002 school-year. Enrollment of U.S. students has more than tripled between 1985-86 (48,483) and 2001-02 (160,920) according to IIE's Open Doors. That same study yielded results on international education reporting participation from students at Research I institutions was 11.44% and Research II institutions was 11.49%. Findings from this report, as

well as other studies conducted by study abroad organizations, do not include information about American students who go abroad on their own accord.

There are no statistics on the number of American students who arrange to take classes independently at international institutions. “Although the official figures leave out Americans who go abroad on their own to take classes independently without their home institution’s involvement or approval, students who study abroad amount to barely more than 1.0% of the 8 million full-time and 5 million part-time undergraduates attending the 3,400 accredited U.S. colleges and universities,” (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 7). The National Association of Foreign Student Adviser’s (NAFSA) Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad felt in reference to the 1.0% statistic, “Any way you look at it, the number is infinitesimal” (Lane 2003, p. 13).

While the number of American students participating in study abroad programs is increasing, there are a significantly larger number of students visiting the United States from other countries. The overall percentage of students studying at the university level at sister institutions overseas is much lower than the total number of university students staying on their American campuses. The number of U.S. students studying abroad has doubled in less than a decade and tripled over the past 15 years (Greisberg and Johnson 2004). Yet, despite these impressive gains, the reality is that only a minuscule fraction of American college students ever winds up in a classroom outside the United States.

Much to the chagrin of many educators, these low participation rates occur despite surveys indicating year after year that 20 percent or more of a quarter-million incoming freshmen surveyed intended to study abroad during their

academic career (Greisberg and Johnson 2004). There are so many more foreign students seeking an international education by visiting the United States than Americans visiting foreign campuses. There were over three times the number of international students (584,000) studying on American campuses during the 2002-2003 academic year than the number of American students who studied internationally. Greisberg and Johnson (2004) suggest that this indicates that students in other countries feel gaining international knowledge is a higher priority than many students on campuses in the United States.

Of the American students who study abroad, two-thirds study in Western Europe. Almost half the Americans who study abroad go to Britain, Italy, Spain, or France (Greisberg and Johnson 2004). Yet, 95 percent of the world's population growth in the next 50 years will occur outside of Western Europe (Simon 2004). With such an explosion of growth and culture outside of Western Europe, it would behoove students of the United States to seek out opportunities in countries outside the confines of Western Europe.

A study conducted by the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) in 2002 reported participant information from four decades of study abroad. IES is a 53-year-old, not-for-profit, academic consortium with more than 155 selective/very-selective Carnegie-Classified U.S. colleges and universities as members. There are currently more than 155 members including Harvard, Yale, Emory, Brandeis and Brown to name a few. The consortium offers 25 study-abroad programs in 14 countries and sends more than 3,000 students abroad each year (Boston Herald 2003). When the organization was first founded in 1950 it was known as the Institute of European Studies, but as

the program became more and more global the institute changed its name to IES. “The majority of these programs (18) utilize the hybrid model, which encourages students to enroll in both IES-taught and foreign university courses. Seven are direct-enrollment programs. In addition, IES provides significant intercultural experiences through planned activities, career-building internships, student housing choices, emphasis on health and safety, and around-the-clock student services” (Dwyer 2004, p. 20).

The longitudinal study conducted by IES surveyed 17,000 alumni who had participated in its programs between 1950 and 1999. The study reported that in spite of shorter terms abroad, participants are still benefiting significantly from the academic, language, and intercultural results of an education abroad experience (Dwyer 2004). “The primary purpose of the study was to measure the various impacts of studying abroad over a 50-year period (1950 to 1999 academic years)” (Dwyer 2004, p. 16). More than 10 times as many students in the 1990s enrolled in internships while studying abroad as did in the 1950s and 1960s. In every decade, a significant percentage of respondents (on average 63 percent) reported that participating in an internship influenced their career. The percentage of students studying abroad for less than 10 weeks has tripled from the 1950s and 1960s to the 1990s. Also, three times as many students in the 1990s versus the 1950s and 1960s have studied abroad prior to participating in an IES program (Dwyer 2004).

Dwyer’s study discovered that colleges are promoting education abroad throughout the college experience and not just in the third year of study, which is what has typically been emphasized. Not only have colleges played a role in

marketing and promoting study abroad programs on campus, but the study results showed the availability of study abroad programs impacts students' selection of U.S. undergraduate institutions they attend. While universities are broadening their options for international experiences, the study shows the field of education abroad has expanded significantly since 1950, diversifying from primarily island and foreign university-based programs in the 1950s to a broader assortment of program choices today. The variety of programs being offered is beneficial because the academic interests of students are changing. According to Dwyer's study, the largest academic interests being represented in study abroad programs today are business majors. This is different from study abroad programs of the past where the largest segments of students were majoring in humanities, social sciences and foreign languages.

"The measurements of the behavioral and academic impact of study abroad yielded outstanding results," said Mary Dwyer, IES president. Not only was it apparent that study abroad was a life-changing event at the time it occurred, but those effects continue to influence students' lives long after the experience has passed (Boston Herald 2003). This behavioral impact was noted in another study conducted by the New Jersey State Consortium for International Studies. This study completed in 2002 showed the experience of studying abroad has a very positive impact on university students. The study surveyed students who participated in study abroad programs from Fall 1997 to Summer 2002. Among character traits students claimed to have gained while studying abroad were feeling worldlier than before, having a greater interest in international affairs, an increase in second and third language fluency and

cultural manifestations. Personal development reflected in study results included more independence, more outgoing, friendlier toward people of foreign cultures, more self-assured and uninhibited about traveling to non-English speaking countries (Hadis 2005). The development of a more global citizenship is the driving force for many institutions promoting study abroad programs.

## **GLOBALIZATION**

“America has a vested interest in having a more informed and globally competent citizenry” (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 6). On September 11, 2001, for the first time since the violence at Pearl Harbor, Americans were threatened and attacked on their own soil. The damage that occurred was physically and emotionally taxing on citizens of the United States at a global magnitude. The world had changed; the United States superpower had been dealt a significant blow. Educational institutions feared that interest in study abroad programs would fade as a result of the tragic events that occurred on September 11 in the United States. However, in two separate studies conducted by IIE in 2001 and a study in 2002 by the American Council on Education, analysis of the results indicated that 9/11 has had little to no impact on international study participation and international enrollment levels at foreign institutions (Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002). While September 11 has not made a significant impact on participation in international study programs, the events that occurred on that day made a very significant impact on American attitudes and perceptions.

The National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA) developed a Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad and in an effort to address the needs of global competence, the group proposed a national effort to promote study abroad in the wake of September 11. “We strongly believe that the events of September 11, 2001, constituted a wake-up call—a warning that America’s ignorance of the world is now a national liability. Americans in vastly greater numbers must devote a substantive portion of their education to gaining an understanding of other countries, regions, languages and cultures, through direct personal experience” (Simon 2004, p. iv). The need for global awareness is more an issue than ever. It is imperative for the future of all Americans that the youth, the potential leaders of tomorrow learn about other cultures and societies so that they are better prepared when facing difficult decisions. “It is now cliché to talk about how small the world has become, and to note how the globalization of communications and commerce affects everyday life. But it is true. Our colleges and universities must respond to this reality by better equipping students to live and work in the interconnected world of the twenty-first century. We desperately need to understand other countries and other cultures—friend and foe alike” (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 1).

“Since 9/11, it has become more and more clear that our country simply cannot afford to remain ignorant of the rest of the world. The stakes are too high,” says Dr. Richard W. Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education and co-chair of the Strategic Task Force. The generation that will lead our country tomorrow must receive an International education today. The question arises how is America’s future expected to compete in an ever-changing global

environment when today Americans speak fewer foreign languages, demonstrate less interest in foreign cultures, and are more naïve in interpersonal situations than a majority of their trading partners, contributing to a culture that does not appear to value the development of international programs (Adler 2002; Webb et al. 2000 cited in Bakalis and Joiner 2004). They (American students) must have opportunities to learn about other countries, other cultures and other points of view, from direct experience, as an integral part of their higher education (Lane 2003).

Not only does former U.S. Secretary of Education Riley have strong convictions about study abroad and the necessary role it should play in the higher education of American students, but Patricia Harrison, the State Department's assistant secretary for educational and cultural affairs concurs. Harrison was quoted as saying, "Some feared that in the wake of 9/11 young Americans would shrink from international experiences, and pursue only domestic options. But as the new Open Doors report shows, more students are studying abroad than ever before, a sign that young Americans clearly recognize the crucial role they will play in leading our nation into a world even more connected than it is today" (Open Doors Report cited by Institute of International Education November 18, 2003, <http://www.iie.org>). While there has been a slight increase in participation of international exchange programs it is still not a significant amount.

Despite the global expansion of higher education, the importance of international studies on American campuses declined over recent decades. In 1960, 35.0% of college students were enrolled in foreign language classes

whereas today only 7.84% of all college students are enrolled in a foreign language course. Over 77% of American college and universities allow students to graduate without taking any foreign language. There are several theories as to why the numbers dropped during this time frame and one possibility posed was that American's interests were going through a period of change (Dubois 1995).

NAFSA reports that the only way for U.S. citizens to survive and succeed in a global world is to be culturally aware through recognized and elite international education programs. NASFA claims that study abroad must become a requirement and not an option. However, the task force identifies that the only true way for this to happen is through a change in Federal policy. "A policy to promote global learning, which recognizes that providing Americans with opportunities to acquire the skills, attitudes, and perceptions that allow them to be globally and cross-culturally competent is central to U.S. security and economic interests in the twenty-first century" (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 2). NAFSA believes government needs to require U.S. college graduates to take at least one foreign language and have competency in a minimum of one foreign area. According to their research, there should be a major national effort to incorporate study abroad at higher educational institutions in the United States. The NAFSA/Alliance white paper states that study abroad at the collegiate level must become the norm, not the exception. "Studying abroad is required of even fewer students in our institutions of higher education, despite an increasing need to understand our neighbors around the globe" (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 1).

NAFSA is not the only national force attempting to promote international understanding. President George W. Bush also recognized the need for global awareness when he said, “America’s leadership and national security rest on our commitment to educate and prepare our youth for active engagement in the international community” (Bush cited in Greisberg and Johnson 2004). The President was referring to all international communities, and one obvious opportunity for advancement in the intercultural realm is for American youth to study abroad. Despite the President’s verbal support and call to action for study abroad and international education experiences, most international study abroad programs are supported by private funding and on an institutional bases. “In fact, there are early precedents of federal support for private education overseas by way of the back door” (Dubois 1995, p. 1).

Greisberg and Johnson (2004) emphasize the importance of learning about all cultures, not just countries where the United States has a history of discord. It is not just the Middle East of which we are ignorant. As a nation we suffer from a pervasive lack of knowledge about the world. There have been eras in American history where individuals have savored their isolation from the rest of the world (Greisberg and Johnson 2004). In today’s era of security debacles and constant threats to Americans all over the world, U.S. citizens need to understand, not agree, but understand how other cultures view the world. “To successfully navigate the new millennium, we will need leaders who are able to understand global crises not only from an American vantage point, but also from those of our allies and our adversaries” (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 2).

Study abroad is not just an opportunity for students to learn about other cultures, it becomes an opportunity for individuals to step outside their comfort level and evaluate their own culture. People who have not had the fortune to travel abroad may initially be shocked at the barrage of questions they may face from international people regarding American traditions and values. This situation forces Americans abroad to analyze and focus on their own culture. “They are surprised to find that ordinary citizens of the country they are visiting will grill them on American policies and politics, and force them to defend beliefs they may always have taken for granted. This is an education that no civics class back home can duplicate. Study abroad brings an increased appreciation for one’s own culture and traditions, as well as a more sympathetic understanding of the views and norms of others” (Greisberg and Johnson 2004, p. 6).

Education outside of the classroom is one of the many positive experiences study abroad students gain from international schooling. By having person to person contact students are immersed into cultures and societies that are very different from relationships they more than likely have in their own hometowns. “Students should engage in dialogue with people of diverse backgrounds whenever possible because true global awareness and intercultural competencies can only be developed through encounters with diverse populations within dominant cultures” (Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002, p. 4). The justification for U.S. study abroad lies in the belief that Americans are part of a larger picture. They are individuals who partake in the world as citizens and

professionals and the experience of intertwining their daily lives with other cultures results in personal growth and development (Burns and Briggs 1985).

The Center for Global Education at Augsburg College realizes the need for contact between cultures in educational settings. In its mission statement, the college stresses the importance of an international experience. Their mission is to provide cross-cultural educational opportunities in order to foster critical evaluation of local and global conditions so that personal, organizational and systemic changes take place, leading to a more just and sustainable world (Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002). All of their objectives point toward more global citizens, more aware individuals and overall more culturally aware leaders.

The culturally aware leaders of tomorrow have to be exposed to situations where they interact with a variety of people and places. A classroom setting is not always the best place to practice these skills. It is in fact, secondary education and the experiences abroad that many schools have to offer that allow students to use diplomatic decision-making and effective conversation. It is more and more evident that students are realizing the benefits to study abroad, both personally and professionally. “The increases reflect a growing interest in study abroad, as more institutions provide their students with opportunities to receive academic credit for studying abroad. Hopefully this trend is indication that students and institutions have a growing awareness of a need to better understand the world beyond U.S. borders” (Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002, p. 42).

Institutions are realizing that students desire an international option, but often students find it hard to commit to a full semester or year. According to NAFSA's Report of the Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad, Americans who study abroad over 90 percent go for a semester or less. Of that percentage, many students go for just a few weeks. With colleges and universities aware that students are not willing to devote a longer period of time to international experiences they are offering shorter, but still as thorough, opportunities abroad. "The increase in short programs—typically during the summer or January—reflects a growing belief that students should learn more about the world beyond the United States. But it also reflects recognition by many colleges that some students will not go abroad unless the experiences come in smaller packages" (Arenson 2003, p. 17). The institutions, just like the students, are realizing that studying abroad is not just a sojourn from the world of real classes. Universities and colleges are being confronted with the bold truth that today's students need to be part of the global movement taking place and one ideal solution is to offer programs at sister universities in other countries.

It is an important relationship for students and professors; the exchange is beneficial for anyone who expects to understand and live in a global environment. International and intercultural exposure at any age provides a multitude of positive influences and advantageous experiences. Again, not only on a personal level, but an individual's professional development relies on experiences in different situations. "Today, more so than ever before, it is absolutely *critical* that students and faculty study and experience the international business environment. In addition to learning what occurs from on-site visits and

presentations, students and faculty will experience cultural diversity at the macro- and micro levels” (Festervand and Tillery 2001, p. 110).

“Study abroad, of course, is one small aspect of global movement in a world that appears to be constantly in motion: refugees, immigrants, the international jet set, road warriors, and tourists dominate the reality of international travel. Yet, study abroads' significance lies not in its current numbers, but in its growing popularity on American university and college campuses, and its symbolic place in many universities' and colleges' new commitments to preparing students for life in an increasingly globalized world” (Dolby 2004, p. 155). Experiences gained from study abroad are incomparable. It is the combination of the setting individuals are exposed to and the learning style used in their study abroad schools and potential work environments that make this experience an asset.

“Just as experiential education seeks more than simply education for the sake of knowledge alone, the field of study abroad did not develop in a political vacuum but rather in a world full of cultural conflicts and inequalities which many believe can be addressed and someday overcome by promoting global understanding through study abroad. Like the field of experiential education, the field of study abroad generally embraces the notion of education for transformation, as research indicates that study abroad is generally “purported to endow students with an international perspective-knowledge, attitudes and skills which presumably lead to a better educated citizenry and ultimately to improved international relations and global understanding” (Kauffman et al. 1992, p. 56, cited in Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002).

## **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

“Experiential educators often quote a Chinese proverb, sometimes attributed to Confucius: “tell me, and I will forget; show me, and I may remember; involve me, and I will understand” (Steinberg 2002, p. 211). The level of

involvement students are exposed to in study abroad situations is unlike any other learning experience, especially if students live with an international family. Learning takes place not only in the classroom setting of the international schools, but in the living situations, extracurricular activities and relationships with peers.

Learning by experiencing truly makes a lasting impression on students. “Perhaps one of the most important things to be learned in the study abroad experience is how to become open to processes of change, both within oneself and in the world. Hence, experiential education should be attentive to the learner’s personal development and ability to integrate the educational experience into his or her own life” (Dewey 1997; Freire 1970; Gochenour and Janeway 1999; Wallace 1993 cited in Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002). Steinberg (2002) found evidence that study abroad and the experiential offerings associated with it have significant and measurable long-term impacts on those who have studied abroad. Students who study abroad take advantage of opportunities other than just international class exposure. There are increasingly more and more students who explore opportunities like internships, field study and research as well as service learning that enrich their experiential learning situation (Steinberg 2002). “Experiential opportunities are especially valuable in study abroad programs, because they foster growth in intercultural competence, reinforce and deepen classroom learning about host societies, and contribute to students’ fluency in target languages” (Steinberg 2002, p. 222).

International study abroad programs are not all established with experiential education as the key component. “While it is clear that study abroad

is not always rooted in the philosophies of experiential education, study abroad and experiential education are natural partners because they share a common goal of empowering students and preparing them to become responsible global citizens” (Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002, p. 46). Often, the experiential learning process is overlooked when study abroad programs are assessed. But, in fact, experiential learning sends students out of the classroom into a world that is complex and interconnected, challenging their prevailing world view and their ability to take responsibility for their own learning (Montrose 2002). Participants and educators link the international component of study abroad as the sole reason it is such an invaluable learning experience. However, the process of learning is as important as the environments where students learn. The Director of Academic Programs for the International Education of Students (IES) said, “over the years, I have come to appreciate how much the experiential dimension in study abroad programs fosters students’ development both academically and in terms of inter-cultural competence” (Steinberg 2002, p. 208).

This dimension, learning through experiences, provides some of the most noteworthy and substantial growth for students enrolled in these programs. Unfortunately, there is little information regarding the true value the experiences have for students because much of the experience is immeasurable. It is difficult to measure the impacts and levels of this learning process. “The activity of studying in a foreign country in and of itself does not provide learning—the kind of learning that can be evaluated, graded and accredited” (Montrose 2002, p. 1). If the experience cannot be translated into a grade, regardless of its popularity or a student’s feeling of accomplishment, colleges and universities cannot and will

not offer study abroad programs. Therefore, institutions trying to offer international experiences are addressing the issues involved with assessing experiential learning. “In experiential learning it is the student who determines intentional, measurable learning objectives. Learning is then evaluated based on reading, writing, presenting, or producing projects that measure achievement based on direct experience” (Montrose 2002, p. 2).

Students are exposed to new cultures and societies where they are forced to learn in different ways and with different tools to complete projects and assignments. Studying abroad typically forces students to step outside their comfort zone, beyond the predictability they are accustomed to in their home learning environments. “Experiential education complements traditional models of education as a method of teaching and learning that supports the individualized knowledge that occurs outside the classroom walls, and allows students to stretch in unique and creative directions” (Montrose 2002, p. 2).

Experiential learning coincides with ‘hands on learning’, like work study or internships. “Experiential education creates a place for the oblong, bulky kind of learning that doesn’t fit as neatly into the classroom format” (Montrose 2002, p. 2). Colleges and university career services tout the importance of internships and work study programs being included in a student’s curriculum prior to college graduation. “Currently, in U.S. colleges and universities, there is increased importance being placed on assessing educational outcomes. This includes an expectation that institutions must demonstrate the value of educational experiences, including hands-on activities that students participate in as part of their preparation to enter their chosen careers” (Hannigan 2000, p. 3). Career

preparation, regardless of major, is one objective all students share at the collegiate level. Students attend colleges and universities with hopes that upon graduation they have the tools necessary to acquire a job in their desired field of interest. The same holds true for students who study abroad, they feel they will grow personally and professionally to better equip themselves for life after college. Their personal growth and traits have been reviewed and studied by various sources.

### **PERSONAL GROWTH/TRAITS**

Studying abroad reveals a great deal about a student's personality and character. Study abroad experiences lead to benefits that will last a lifetime (Boston Herald 2003). "U.S. college students who studied abroad were more likely to travel globally, work overseas and strike more diverse friendships across different races and cultures even years after their experiences, according to the first study to explore the long-term effects of studying abroad on a person's personal and professional life" (Boston Herald 2003). International experiences of this type force individuals to grow academically, professionally and personally.

Students who return from study abroad experiences make academic improvements in several areas. "Following study abroad, students have named improved foreign language proficiency, a critical perspective on the U.S., increased knowledge of the culture of the host country, and increased social competence in unfamiliar settings as significant benefits of their experiences" (Talbert and Stuart 1999, p. 163). The improvement of foreign language skills is an obvious reason many students seek out an international experience.

However, it is not only language improvement students cite as an important reason to study abroad, students have also noted the acquisition of cultural knowledge and a strong desire to travel as additional reasons (Talburtt and Stuart 1999). It is not just the formal classroom study that students are searching for in their study abroad experience, it is opportunities of living with host families and immersing themselves in another culture (Cluett 2002).

“After immersing themselves in a new culture, mastering the challenges of learning in a new and different academic environment, and experiencing the many highs and lows of being a ‘foreigner’, students typically return home with increased self-confidence and justifiable pride in what they have achieved” ([www.edudirectories.com](http://www.edudirectories.com) 2004, p. 1). Increased self-confidence carries into the classroom setting because there are certain situations where students will not participate in class discussions because of timidity they may have in front of fellow students. Students who spend time abroad can incorporate their experiences into their academic programs in several ways. According to the Institute for International Education students who travel internationally deepen their knowledge and understanding of international, political, and economic issues. These are traits gained that can be applied to a student’s academic program and also embedded into their character. When reviewing academic versus personal gains, it becomes apparent the transition is negligible because each permeates the other. There is no clear way to define where one ends and the other begins, rather they work in tandem to benefit the experiences of each other.

While there is need for research in many areas associated with study abroad, the research that has been conducted focus on students' personal growth. Reflections of study abroad and character development are a popular focus of international education studies. Personal gains are noticed by the students as well as their professors once they return from their sojourn.

“International educators at either side of the Atlantic have long recognized that college students returning from studying abroad show positive changes. Rather impressionistically, US educators report that their students return with an enhanced concern about international affairs, are more appreciative of different cultures than before they left their home campuses, and are more mature, self-aware and independent” (Hadis 2005, p. 3). The positive changes are attributes educators note as applicable in and out of the educational setting. Steinburg (2002) notes international education is multi-dimensional learning and the skills gained are just as versatile as the learning environment students are exposed to.

“Study abroad programs foster intellectual growth, language and communication skills, as well as cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal growth” (Steinburg 2002, p. 223).

Findings from various authors suggest that once students return from studying abroad they not only have improved self-images, their communication skills are stronger (Wallace; Gmelch and Gmelch; Ward;. Grand et al. cited in Richard 2001). Authors cite student evaluations to support their claims, however they seldom take the next step and ask exactly how or why all of these things happen (Ward 1995, p. 234 cited in Richard 2001). For example, Wallace reports that:

“Students learn much about the culture they visit. They become more mature and more understanding of themselves. They develop better interpersonal skills and new sensibilities about the wisdom of older people, rural life, or race and class. Frequently, they return with a more positive attitude toward their own formal education.”

Wallace refers to these new found traits and behaviors as “intangibles” and claims they are part of the benefits a student receives by participating in a field school (Richard 2001).

The Education Directories website, an avenue students and parents use to stay informed of services that educational administrators and advisors offer, considers study abroad program information as its major purpose. This website touts that study abroad programs leave a student matured personally and intellectually. The international experience exposes students to new ways of thinking that encourage growth and independence ([www.edudirectories.com](http://www.edudirectories.com) 2004). “In a majority of instances it (study abroad) is a defining moment in a young person’s life” (Boston Herald 2003). The experiences are defining moments for multiple reasons. Growth and independence coupled with a time of reflection and self discovery are just a few behaviors that can be attributed to the international study abroad experience. Brown University’s Office of International Program’s considers studying abroad as a time students realize, “the awareness of the values and way of life of your own country, your own place in that country and its place in the world,” (<http://www.brown.edu/Administration/OIP/files/faqs/> 2004). Determining where each student’s individual beliefs and cultures fall within his or her own society is tested once (s)he are not confined within his or her normal borders. As students are immersed in a society, not just the native

language, but the cultures, politics and economic conditions of years of development there is a new comprehension of national pride. Brian Boubek, president of Cultural Experiences Abroad claims, "Obtaining an international education gives the American student a new understanding of different cultures," (Lane 2003, p. 13 ).

It has been determined that an individual's choices to study abroad may impact him or her personally and academically. The additional benefit that is a result and not always an intention of study abroad is that the experience may act as a resume builder and has the potential to influence career choices after graduation. Thompson (2004) in *An Exploration of the Demand for Study Overseas from American Students and Employers* found future employability was not instrumental in a student's decision to study abroad. "The project looked to identify among students and employers what were their perceptions of overseas study (both full degree experiences as well as short-term programs), who or what influences these perceptions, what their real experience had been in terms of employment, what were the barriers to purchase and ultimately how to overcome these" (Thompson 2004, p. 1). Participants in his research cited reasons other than resume building for their decisions, mostly to experience and travel to other parts of the world, not to enhance their hiring potential. Contrary to Thompson's results, "Koester (1987) has documented that 29.0% of her sample of students involved in overseas educational activities ranked career goals, an aspect of work commitment, as among the top four motivations for participation in overseas learning activities" (Hannigan 2000, p. 4).

The studies and literature reviewed in this section contribute to the overall knowledge and information about the characteristics and personality traits students feel they gain from studying abroad. However, there is other literature that suggests competencies and character traits are not the only qualities influenced through the study abroad process. These experiences also have the potential to influence other life decisions like career choice.

### **CAREER INFLUENCES RESULTING FROM STUDY ABROAD**

Not all students travel abroad with post-graduation plans, but research indicate findings that experiences abroad influence their future decisions. “The international education literature has produced a plethora of impact studies which demonstrate that the overseas experience encourages change in attitudes, values, and interests (Carsello & Grieser 1976; Nash 1976; Pfinister 1972; Koester 1987 cited in Hannigan 2000). With study abroad experiences having an impact on attitudes, values and interests, the potential influence on career decisions is understandable. Hadis (2005) found that students who responded to his study felt personally more independent, outgoing and friendly toward people from other countries. They were more confident and more determined. Having the experiences abroad made participants more likely to define career objectives and goals. The international experience actually helped provide students with more clarity for professional plans.

While living in another country with distinct cultures and customs is one experience, but working and interning in an international environment can be a completely different experience. In 2002 the Institute for International Education

of Students surveyed 3,400 of their alumni from programs. “Students who participated in internships and field placements on IES programs were much more likely to say that study abroad ignited their interest in a career direction pursued after graduation. Of the students who had participated in internships or field placements, 60% said that study abroad enabled them to acquire skills that influenced their career paths, while 50% of those who had not participated agreed. Students who held internships or field placement were more than likely than the others to suggest that study abroad enabled them to tolerate ambiguity, more likely to suggest that study abroad influenced their participation in community organizations, and more likely to agree that study abroad influenced them to explore other cultures“(Steinberg 2002, p. 218). The same study produced results showing that more than 10 times as many students in the 1990s enrolled in internships while studying abroad than did in the 1950s and 1960s. An average of 63% of respondents reported that participating in an internship while studying abroad influenced their career decisions (Dwyer 2004).

Students who choose to participate in an internship while studying abroad have different exposures than those students who only study abroad through classes and field experiences. Kauffman (1992) found that students are open to a variety of individual work experiences with each international company or job situation. “Overseas students are exposed to work settings that have their own unique cultural idiosyncrasies, including; (1) a constant feeling of being and outsider, (2) the need to use one’s personal resources more than in one’s home country where it is easier to retreat to the comforts of family and friends for social and emotional support, and (3) demands of a foreign language (in those

countries where English is not the lingua franca)” (Kauffmann 1992, p. 81). The choice to work abroad broadens student experiences in a variety of scenarios. Certain professions where skills are highly transferable include, but are not limited to law, medicine, social work, teaching and international business. Regardless of the language, culture, economic situation or job title, the duties are similar in any society. “Thus, they (international work experiences) are simultaneously altruistic and pre-professional, if not explicitly vocational” (Cluett 2002, p. 17).

Not only do professions like education, medicine and law view international work experiences as beneficial to a student’s credentials, but careers in international banking, international development and the import/export business place a lot of weight on practical overseas experience (Hannigan 2000). The process of obtaining and following through with work experiences and studying abroad makes a student stand out above peers who choose not to participate. John Perry, Director of International Education at the State University of New York professes students that study abroad are proven self-starters who can hit the ground running. Perry claims regardless of the situation those students who study abroad can tackle any scenario thrown at them (cited in Thomas 2004).

Study abroad has been reported to not only have influences on career selection, but the topic of studying abroad and the experiences associated with it are becoming protocol in some company recruitment practices and policies.

## **CORPORATE RECRUITMENT**

The idea that students become more career driven, confident, culturally diverse, and highly motivated as a result of studying abroad has sparked interests in some corporate recruiters and human resource hiring managers. There is a trend and, “Now more than ever, U.S. education abroad students are landing careers with international or multinational organizations” (Dwyer 2004, p. 14). Dwyer (2004) also found students who graduated in the 1980s and 1990s reported that studying abroad influenced their abilities to work for a multinational organization in the United States or secured a job overseas much more than generations previous who had also studied abroad. With the increase of workforce diversity and the rise of multinational corporations, an expanding need exists for dynamic employees in organizations (Bakalis and Joiner 2004).

With the need for a new kind of employee the interview and recruitment process is being tweaked and improved to better suit the current needs of employers. Bradley (2003) reviewed current hiring processes and described the various tactics companies are using to find and employ viable candidates. There are a number of stages companies employ throughout the hiring process, the initial stage is recruitment. Once recruiters seek out and identify potential clients they are pre-screened, screened and finally interviewed. Bradley’s (2003) findings show that employers’ most important selection criteria in recruiting a candidate are interpersonal skills, and when questioned employers believe that these skills are likely to be strong in a candidate who has had an overseas education experience. Also, during the interview process when an individual has “studied abroad” experience on their resume it often becomes a topic of

conversation. If anything it is an opportunity for personality traits and communication skills to be expressed. Students reported that employers were impressed they had the courage to study overseas and sought out the international experience while many other applicants took a more traditional learning approach (Thompson 2004).

Recruitment includes assessing the organization's need, creating a job description, determining the criteria for an ideal candidate, writing an effective job posting, and communicating or marketing the opening so as to recruit a strong pool of candidates. Screening can range from weeding through resumes to preliminary interviews conducted via telephone. Interviewing typically implies meeting face-to-face with a candidate in order to determine his or her suitability for the open position (Bradley 2003). According to a Harvard Business School study more than 75% of turnover in a corporation can be attributed to poor interviewing and hiring practices. So, the recruitment and hiring process is pivotal in hiring not only the most qualified, but the best fit for the job. "While turnover never can be eliminated, for it's a fact of life that employees sometimes do leave for other jobs, a lot of unnecessary turnover stems from hiring decisions that either ignore or fail to recognize a poor fit between the person and the job or the organization's culture" (Bradley 2003).

Study abroad on a resume shows that student had a different experience than students who never left their American campus classrooms during their college careers. Study abroad has always been worthwhile, but not necessarily the kind of attribute that would get you hired. In today's marketplace, those with study abroad experience are becoming more and more relevant to employers

(Thomas 2004). “A shrewd recruiter picks up the person whose resume says, ‘I backpacked in...or I studied in...’ It means that person has dealt with other cultures on an everyday basis. Employers know that this is the kind of employee who can be sent abroad to work with team members from other international offices and who won’t call the home office in a panic because he or she couldn’t stand the food or cope without a car” (Thomas 2004, [www.petersons.com/stdyabrd/abroad1.html](http://www.petersons.com/stdyabrd/abroad1.html)). The presence of study abroad has the potential to enhance a resume (Lane 2003). Braquet-Dorel (1985) found that when candidate’s resumes are compared and the academic qualifications are identical but one has had study abroad experience companies take notice. “The reference to study abroad experience stands out to signal a candidate’s initiative, self-reliance, persistence, ability to adapt to differing value cultures, and to cope with ambiguity” (Braquet-Dorel 1985, cited in Opper 1991).

The ability to adapt to varying work environments and work with people from other cultures are characteristics companies, especially international companies, are seeking. Even if a global company does not require international experience they are more likely to choose a candidate who has that experience over one who does not (Yates 2002). Companies might be located in Southeastern or Midwestern portions of the United States but their employees have the potential to communicate with individuals all over the globe on a daily basis (Thomas 2004). “Such students are also likely to have other transnational competencies that graduate and professional schools and employers value just as highly; cross-cultural communication skills, analytical skills, an understanding of and familiarity with local customs and cultural contexts, flexibility, resilience,

and the ability to adapt to new circumstances and deal constructively with differences (IIE 1997)” ([www.edudirectories.com](http://www.edudirectories.com) 2004). Denise Connerty, Director of International Programs at Temple University and current President of NAFSA Association of International Educators says, “For a long time study abroad advisers have been saying that study abroad is for all students, not just language majors. Now that view is being reinforced by businesses who are increasingly seeking to hire candidates with international experience” (Thomas 2004, p. 1).

Companies like General Electric, once only found in the United States, have branches and offices located all over the world. The employees they hire today require skills and abilities to not only function, but compete for business at the international level. An article in *The Business Review* (1996) reported that General Electric looks for employees who have familiarity with other cultures. Key leadership at GE recognizes the need for globalization in the marketplace and the importance of having management with international experience (Wiles 1996). Tom Moore, dean of the Arthur D. Little School of Management in Cambridge, Mass., agreed with GE in their approach to recognizing and hiring strong employees. “Whether they’re in the United States, India or Korea, companies are trying to figure out how to get their managers to think internationally and how to deal with the fact that they’re facing global competition,” Moore said (Wiles 1996, p. 1). With global competition on the forefront of every corporation’s list of threats, it is necessary to have the most valuable employees. More and more often companies are choosing applicants with international experience because this has a reflection on characteristics and

personality traits they deem beneficial for their company. The director of the Study Abroad Programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr. Robert Miles says, “Global citizenship makes an applicant stand out—they have gone the extra mile to gain experience” (cited in Yates 2002, p. 32). Contrary to these positive employee/employer benefits, Van Hoof (1999) found that industry recruiters did not value the international/experiences very highly.

With the globalization of so many business markets it is not surprising that the literature regarding international companies and corporate hiring practices makes a strong case for the need for globally competent employees with strong cultural diversity skills. Global competence and cultural awareness are only two character traits companies find advantageous in diverse work environments.

## **SKILLS BENEFICIAL TO EMPLOYERS**

As the number of students completing post-secondary education and graduate programs continues to rise, students are trying to find a competitive edge when entering the workforce. “With increasing reliance upon knowledge-based industries, and, in most professional arenas the immediacy of a transnational presence, the competitive edge in seeking employment may lie in possession of ‘transferable, intellectual, personal and enabling skills’ in addition to the requisite technical and specialist knowledge” (cited in Kingston 1985, p. 53). Opper (1991) suggests that some transferable skills include the ability to communicate verbally and orally, analyze complex issues, and problem solve. Other skills that may give candidates a competitive edge include adaptability,

self-awareness and the successful group collaboration as well as leadership qualities (Opper 1991).

Today a prerequisite to work for an organization or company is the ability to adapt to change as well as be openly diverse in a variety of situations and circumstances (Bakalis and Joiner 2004). “Their (study abroad participants) newfound self-confidence, perseverance, risk-taking, and ability to face the unknown easily translate into real job offers. In a global workplace, study-abroad students are extremely marketable” (Thomas 2004, [www.petersons.com/stdyabrd/abroad1.html](http://www.petersons.com/stdyabrd/abroad1.html)). The characteristics participants gain after their international experience not only increase their likelihood of being hired, but skills are developed that can carry into multiple aspects of their personal lives (Bakalis and Joiner 2004). Personal growth that occurs in their academic lives as well as in their social lives contributes to a better equipped, more well-rounded individual, making them an asset to the company who hires them. “The benefits of study abroad programs are quite evident—the development of important life skills, including maturity and confidence; a “global outlook”; enhanced communication skills; cultural sensitivity and adaptability; and access to networks offering employment opportunities. These are qualities that are highly valued by multinational corporations that seek to hire graduates that can function effectively across national borders” (cited in Bakalis and Joiner 2004, p. 290). The Institute of International Education reports that students who have returned from a successful study abroad experience possess international knowledge and second language skills. It is not these skills alone that make study abroad participants such driving forces in the job market ([www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org), 2004). The cross-

cultural communication skills, flexibility, resilience, and the ability to adapt to new circumstances and deal constructively with differences are defining characteristics for this group of individuals.

Enhanced communication, interpersonal and intercultural skills can all lead to a much more effective employee and successful manager. Dr. Roy A. Herberger Jr., president of Thunderbird Graduate School affiliated with the Garvin School of International Management and has been ranked number one in international business by U.S. News & World Report for eight consecutive years believes, “A student who has lived in another culture...learns an adaptive skill that translates to being a more effective manager” (cited in Lane 2003, p. 11). An effective manager is one who can demonstrate leadership through open communication, decision-making, and acceptance of all cultures and social backgrounds. Studying abroad forces individuals to adapt and adjust to circumstances in a variety of settings. Study abroad returnees have demonstrated that they can thrive in new and often challenging environments. A student’s participating in a job or internship in an international setting is one example of this skill. “In these placements, students have direct encounters with different work cultures, social attitudes, gender relationships, organizational structures, legal arrangements moral and norms and many other unfamiliar patterns of behavior, communication, and social organization” (cited in Steinberg 2002, p. 212).

Living in another culture by participating in study abroad programs has a significant and lasting impact on students that affects their academic, career, intercultural, personal and social development. Dwyer (2004) found there were

lasting effects regardless of the decade students participated in an IES study abroad program. Thompson (2004) found that employers recognized the effects of study abroad in candidates including cross cultural communication skills, flexibility, autonomy, maturity, ambition, independence and cultural awareness. His study also concluded that employers recognized individuals with international experience had a wider perspective of the world, more experience and possessed a greater knowledge of oversea markets than did other candidates interviewing for jobs.

## **SUMMARY**

The need for research on study abroad is growing as a result of the changing global environment. The current research is limited and not necessarily indicative or realistic regarding study abroad or those who choose to participate in it. Studies acknowledge that participants of study abroad are affected in positive ways. It is imperative that colleges, universities, government, and the private sector all make an effort to emphasize the importance of a global education. There is a need for global competency, cultural diversity and international awareness. The studies and research conducted reveal the affects study abroad can have on an individual. “While research on the impact of study abroad on both participants and host communities is limited, certainly many participants in international exchange demonstrate a deepened appreciation for the importance of intercultural understanding” (cited in Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich 2002, p. 31).

Organizations like NAFSA are on the cutting edge of study abroad development and making strides for research development. Dr. Victor Johnson, the associate executive director for public policy at NAFSA, said, "There has to be a marriage between the resources of the government to help students go abroad and the efforts of the schools to help students understand this is an option for them and to make it as affordable for the student as possible" (Lane 2003, p. 3). NAFSA's Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad (2004) outlines recommendations to be made to increase the number of students who travel abroad for international study. Even though the numbers of study abroad participants at colleges and universities is increasing, educators indicate the numbers are not sufficient. The report suggests that the United States Congress and the Executive Branch of government should establish a national policy on study abroad programs and provide financial support that will help make them possible. The report also recommends that Governors and state legislatures need to adopt state policies supportive of international education and find ways to help students afford study abroad. A third suggestion in the report is directed at colleges and university administration. NAFSA indicated that college and university presidents should encourage study abroad in all fields, simultaneously helping make it more affordable and accessible. Private businesses are asked to play their part as well by letting schools know that students with international experience will be valued in the work force. Private businesses are also urged to give schools financial support and offer study abroad internships. Finally, NAFSA's task force suggests that accrediting agencies should rework their curriculum requirements to include a "global competency". The goal of these

efforts would be to increase participation in study abroad programs, with 20 percent of American college graduates having studied abroad by 2010, and 40 percent having done so by 2040 (Lane 2003). This is undoubtedly a huge undertaking, but national organizations realize the significant impact study abroad has on the lives of American college students.

In a message from the strategic task force on education abroad in 2004, Paul Simon urged colleges and university presidents to execute approaches to promote and encourage student participation in study abroad across all majors. “They (college and university presidents) must involve the faculty, ease curricular rigidities, counter-financial disincentives, and create new study abroad models and diverse study abroad options that recognize the changed demographics of U.S. higher education today and make study abroad accessible to the broadest possible spectrum of students”( Simon 2004, p. iv). The point where colleges and universities influence ends is where the private sector must step in with action. The relationship between schools and the corporate job market must have the common thread of encouraging a globally competent workforce and each side needs to be methodical in their execution (Simon 2004). While private and public universities and businesses need to be instrumental in supporting study abroad programs local and federal governments need to feel equally obligated. “Governors and state legislatures must make international education an integral part of their strategic planning enhancing state economic development and competitiveness” (Simon 2004, p. iv).

Overall, the number of students participating in study abroad programs has been increasing over the past decade but, there is a definite lack of research

on study abroad participation. “Despite the growth in the numbers of U.S. students studying abroad, and study abroad’s increasingly common place in U.S. universities’ globalizing rhetoric, actual research on study abroad participants is quite limited” (Dolby 2004, p. 153). While the field of study abroad is growing, studies associated with this population are limited in number and scope. The research being done revolving around these programs concentrates on language acquisition and academic outcomes of study abroad (Dolby 2004).

While charting the impacts of study abroad, Mary Dwyer revealed that no longitudinal and quantitative studies exist comparing student experiences abroad across a series of decades. Dwyer completed a study for IES and found, “Regardless of which decade students studied abroad, the academic, career, intercultural, and personal/social benefits were statistically significant, powerful, and enduring. This has policy implications for the support of study abroad by U.S. colleges, parents and employers” (Dwyer 2004, p. 20). The results of statistical significance is the research confirmation needed for stakeholders to take action. As Dwyer points out, there is a need for colleges, parents and employers to make a concerted effort to promote and encourage the importance of international study.

After reviewing literature about the many facets of study abroad, studies and reports mainly focus on student involvement, expectations, learning styles and attributes gained from participating in these experiences. Literature also suggests that one of the major benefits of studying abroad is the potential for a more competitive resume upon graduation. However, while study abroad programs are touting this as a major benefit of studying abroad, there are a

limited number of studies reflecting employer's opinions and the value they may place on these experiences. Some studies have actually indicated international experiences are not valued very highly by some employers (Van Hoof, 2004). Through the literature review, studies have shown that even though study abroad improves skills, knowledge and abilities there has been little research on employers' perceptions of these experiences. It is imperative more research focus on hiring managers, college recruiters and human resource directors of companies hiring new graduates, to determine if study abroad really does make an impact during the interviewing and hiring process.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter describes the research design for this study and data collection techniques, and the data analysis. The research was conducted in several phases as samples were chosen based on availability. There were two major phases used in data collection. The first phase was contacting with corporations in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina based on information presented and provided by the Research Triangle Institute. The career services department at North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provided contact opportunities for the second phase of the sampling. Respondents answered a ten question, open ended survey questionnaire through electronic email and personal in-depth interviews.

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

##### *Research Triangle Park*

The first data set was administered and collected as a convenience sample in the fall of 2004. Subjects were chosen based on their location and proximity to Research Triangle Park, N.C. The area located between Duke University found in Durham, NC, North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is familiar to outsiders today as, the Research Triangle Park. The Research Triangle Park developed when a group of individuals sat down in the mid-fifties and developed a concept for an

area with one sole purpose: research. Leaders from business, academia and industry created the public/private research park.

With the accolades bestowed upon the Research Triangle Park there is little question why so many companies call North Carolina home. Forbes magazine ranked the area the #1 Best City for Education and the #3 Best Place For Business and Careers in 2003. It was named the #1 Best Place to Live and Work in June 2003 by Employment Review Magazine. The state of North Carolina was ranked the #4 Top Biotechnology State by Plants, Sites & Parks in March 2003. The Miliken Institute ranked Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill as the #3 U.S. Metro Area in the country in 2004. Most recently, in May, 2004, Forbes named the Research Triangle Park the #2 Best Place for Business.

Eight miles long and two miles wide, the Research Triangle Park is comprised of 131 organizations and approximately 50% of the employees in the Park work for international corporations. A wide variety of research fields include pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, public health, statistics, environmental sciences, biotechnology/biopharmaceutical, information technology and computer hardware/software corporations. More than 99% of the people employed at the park work for research and development companies. Total payroll for Park employees is estimated at \$2.7 billion and the average salary of an RTP employee is \$56,000.

Initially letters were mailed to the human resources departments with a contact name if one was provided by the Research Triangle Institute (Appendix A). The letters indicated that the contact person was being selected to participate in a study by the National Travel Association and the National Youth

and Student Travel Association in conjunction with North Carolina State University. The objective here was to determine the contact at each company who could best answer the questions, with recruiters and hiring managers in mind. The research questions needed to be answered by qualified individuals at each of the companies. The letter described the purpose of the survey and indicated that respondents would be receiving a phone call to schedule an interview. Once phone calls were made to each respondent a follow up email was sent (Appendix B). Respondents typically wanted the questionnaire through email, though there were several who were interviewed in person or via the telephone. The questionnaire is provided in Appendix C.

#### *Career Fairs: NC State and UNC- Chapel Hill*

Every college and university has a career services department to help provide assistance to students seeking jobs after graduation. Throughout the school year, at most colleges and universities, career services departments hold career fairs and have local businesses and students attend. Typically, the fairs occur within the first couple months of the fall and spring semesters each academic year. North Carolina State University (NCSU) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) both schedule six to eight fairs each semester. Career fairs offer students opportunities to network, interview and ask questions of potential job prospects. Many times the recruiters who attend the fairs are alumni of that specific college or university. Usually each career fair is major-specific and is heavily concentrated with employers in one field. NCSU offers very competitive mathematical and scientific degrees while UNC-CH offers

a broader selection of liberal arts degrees. Therefore, at each school only certain fairs are offered. Some include engineering fairs, social science fairs, agriculture and life science fairs but the variety all depends on the size of that major population on each campus. Companies use this type of recruiting as a time to meet students in person. It is a way for recruiters and human resource personnel to screen candidates other than the normal ways of online applications and the typical resume process. Nothing replaces in-person contact for making an impression, both the employer and students can learn about one another.

At NCSU there were three career fairs in the first several months of spring semester 2005. Contacts and companies represented at these fairs were contacted to participate in this study. There was an Engineering Career Fair, a career fair hosted by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and a College of Management career fair in spring 2005. North Carolina State University's Career Services values its association with employers who recruit and hire NC State students and graduates. Their goal is to develop and expand those partnerships which benefit the employer, its' students, and the University. Employer partners contribute time, expertise, and funding to the career center and the center encourages suggestions and ideas to continually improve upon the center's goals. Contact was made with the college liaison for each fair and the information was exchanged through emails. At UNC-CH the career services department offers access to all of the contact information for fair participants on their website. Through this website the email addresses, company names and contacts for participants of their fall and spring career fairs were listed. Emails

were sent to the college campus recruiter or the human resource contact at each of the companies in attendance at the fairs.

The selection of the sampling 'frame' was based on job title and job description. The survey questions were intended for the individual responsible for recruiting or hiring recent graduates. The objective was to question hiring professionals in the local area relative to North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. It was assumed that the contacts at the career fairs were the appropriate people to ask about each company's hiring practices and recruiting techniques. The same questions were asked of each participant, regardless of the career fair they attended. There were ten open ended questions posed in the email and the time suggested for completion was fifteen minutes. There were duplicate contacts identified among the two career fairs. This is understandable because the two universities offer similar degrees in some fields and regional companies recruit students from both schools.

## **INSTRUMENT DESIGN**

The format of the instrument was designed with the research question and the overall objectives of the study in mind. The questions were standardized open-ended interviews/surveys. The open ended questionnaire was completed as a person to person interview, through an email, or over the phone. Patton (1990, p. 205) described the purpose of interviewing as, "The fundamental principle is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understanding in their own terms." There were ten questions consisting of knowledge, procedural, personal observations and opinion oriented inquiries.

Several questions measured the importance of character traits corporations found beneficial (Appendix C).

The first set of questions focused on company policies and standards for the interview process. Questions were designed to determine if weight was given for specific qualities or characteristics. The second set of questions addressed study abroad and international travel experiences to determine if they were included in company protocols during interview procedures. The intent in asking about this topic was to establish whether study abroad was an important experience and if so, was this reflected in their recruitment policies. The remaining questions were intended to determine if employers value overseas experience in prospective employees and if so why. Also, the questions were asked to reveal what employers perceive to be the value of study abroad and the degree of importance and added significance these experiences add to potential employees' resumes.

A pilot of the letter and questionnaire was conducted by sending them to a specific group of individuals whose responsibilities paralleled those of the population. The letters were sent to hiring managers and human resource professionals at five companies in the Raleigh-Durham area. Following one test, letters were mailed to contacts at Research Triangle Park. A follow-up phone call and email were sent shortly after they received the letter. The recruiter or human resource employee then took part in a telephone interview, person to person interview, or answered the open ended questions electronically and sent the responses using email. Career fair participants were emailed information about the purpose and objectives of the study and once permission was granted

and willingness to participate was established the questions were answered via email.

## **ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this study was to determine if studying abroad or international travel experience increased the hiring potential for corporate employment. “The purposes of research may be exploratory (what’s happening), explanatory (what is shaping this behavior and why), descriptive (what are the salient behaviors), or predictive (what will occur) (Babbie 1986a; Marshall and Rossman 1989) cited in Henderson 1991. Specifically for this case study, do these experiences affect a student’s employability at corporations or organizations around the Research Triangle Park and surrounding communities?

The research question was analyzed using qualitative methods. Qualitative methods, specifically standardized open-ended interviews, were chosen as the most appropriate means to accomplish the goals of this study. “In qualitative approaches the focus is on explaining, developing patterns, and developing grounded theory by using depth of analysis and detail (Henderson 1991, p. 27). Open ended questions were categorized into emerging themes and grouped accordingly. “The secret to developing grounded theory is to take data in the form of descriptions and anecdotes and find patterns and meaning in the data as related to the context in which they occur” (Henderson 1991). By identifying the emerging themes it helped determine through the use of grounded theory, if formal theories were applicable to the research study or if a substantive theory related to the context of the situation had to be developed. “Grounded

theory, also known as inductive theory is developed relative to substantive area (contextual within the place or activity) or relating to formal theory after data are discovered (conceptual within the place or activity)” (Henderson 1991, p. 38).

Observing and analyzing the data as it is collected without applying one specific theoretical backing allows for the qualitative researcher to not jump to conclusions too early. It allows for the creation of a new theory or application of an existing one. Through analysis of the responses from the survey and open ended questions the overall themes that develop can be attributed to a specific theory or may be new patterns. “Patton (1980) suggested that the cardinal principle of qualitative analysis is that causal relationships and theoretical statements be clearly emergent from and grounded in the phenomena studied” (cited in Henderson 1991, p. 41).

It was important to evaluate responses on a case by case basis so that relationships between respondents could be determined. The advantages of using this type of instrument include variations among interviews can be minimized when there is only one survey instrument being used, the interview/survey is highly focused so that the subject’s time is carefully used, and the exact instrument used in the evaluation is available for inspection by decision makers and information users (Patton 1990). However, this type of instrument does not allow the interviewer to pursue topics that are not already written down as part of the survey and it does not take into consideration individual differences and circumstances. While there is the potential for research bias, any interpretations made during this aspect of data collection were refined and expanded during the analysis.

“The qualitative approach also relies on a dynamic interchange between theory, concepts and data throughout the research” (Patton 1991, p. 27). One major difference between the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach is typically that the quantitative approach uses numbers for measurement where qualitative uses words to relay the data. Usually a physical device, such as paper and pencil, is used in quantitative studies while the instrument for qualitative studies is the researcher (Guban and Lincoln 1981 cited in Patton 1991, p. 27). The researcher is seen as the instrument because it is his or her job to describe, infer, judge, evaluate and review the information learned and observed and then translate it into words and informative results to apply to the questions being addressed by the study.

“In grounded theory, the creation of a theory is based on observation rather than on deduction” (Henderson 1991, p. 38). Grounded theory can be applied to qualitative and quantitative research, however depending on the approach each method has benefits and drawbacks (Henderson 1991). The qualitative approach to research includes interpretive procedures that inductively describe, translate, and focus on the meaning rather than the frequency of occurring phenomena in the social world (Van Maanen 1988 cited in Henderson 1991). The analysis was centered on finding patterns in the data set from the sample respondents. “While statistics are helpful, they do not provide explanations” (Henderson 1991, p. 16).

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research questions for this study were derived from the objectives of the study. They were:

Is there a link between experiential learning which takes place abroad and character traits and skills valued by employers?

- a. Does study abroad and the international travel experience associated with it enhance skills that employers look for during interviews?
- b. Does study abroad and the international travel experience associated with it enhance character traits that employers look for during interviews?

## **SUMMARY**

One main objective of this study was to develop a comprehensive list of skills and personal traits hiring employers are seeking in potential employees. It was important to analyze perceptions, attitudes and working models of interviewing styles and hiring procedures at organizations around the Research Triangle Park, NC to determine if study abroad or international travel experience has an impact on a candidate's likelihood of being hired. Another main purpose was to determine if corporate hiring criteria and protocol currently includes questions involving studying abroad and international travel experiences during the hiring phase.

The research design consisted of several phases that were timed around career fairs being offered and scheduling for hiring managers and corporate

recruiters in the Research Triangle Park area. The open-ended question design of the instrument provided space for personal responses, opinions and anecdotes as well as space for reporting different styles of recruitment and employee selection. The research question was the foundation for the questions used to examine the influence study abroad or international travel experiences may or may not have in obtaining a job after college. Questions were asked to determine a hiring manager's perceptions and attitudes toward international exposure at the collegiate level and the value it does or doesn't add to a potential candidate's repertoire. The research question directed the analysis to determine the existence of a relationship between international study and the perception corporate recruiters and hiring managers have toward those experiences.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANAYLSIS AND RESULTS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents data analysis and results of the study. The demographics of the sample population for this study are described and responses to the open-ended questions for the sample population are analyzed. Respondents' answers are organized into percentages and presents the results of the survey questions in chart form. Each question addressed in this section has relevance to the study objectives, research question and hypothesis.

#### **STUDY SAMPLE**

The sample population for this study consisted of representatives from one hundred sixty companies and organizations across Research Triangle Park (RTP), Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The sample for the study was 165 recruiters, hiring managers and personnel directors from these companies. They were selected based on their proximity as well as their participation at career fairs for North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The 89 respondents to the survey were representative of several different types of organizations within the sampled companies. These organizations included financial institutions, corporate headquarters, pharmaceutical companies, public and non-profit organizations as well as internet technology and communication companies.

## ANALYSIS

Standardized open-ended Interview questions were asked of 89 local organizations and corporations through personal interviews, over the telephone and via email from September 2004 through March 2005. Interview transcripts and emails were categorized and separated based on word frequency and interpretation of the responses to each question asked. The goal in this analysis was to characterize corporate interview procedures and recruitment policies in addition to determining qualifications hiring managers look for in potential employees dependent on each business.

The response rate for the survey was 53.9%, 89 of the 165 companies contacted to participate in the research study replied. Of the 89, 26 (29%), declined to be interviewed for the study. Of those who declined, 22 respondents explained that they did not consider study abroad at all in the hiring process and felt they did not fit the study criteria. Responses to the initial permission request for participation included but were not limited to responses like the following:

- *Running around Europe for a summer, meeting Europeans of the opposite sex and eating foreign food. I wouldn't associate study abroad programs with real work experience, as most people who do these programs seem to learn more about language and culture than practical business skills.*
- *Our company is a small start-up and we do not do any travel at this time. I do not think it will be productive to participate in your study.*
- *Study abroad/international travel experience does not play a role in the interviewing process therefore we will not be participating in the study.*
- *Our organization does not consider study abroad in the consideration of teacher candidates.*
- *I have no experience with job applicants with foreign study experience and would only be making subjective guesses to answer your interview questions.*

- *I'd rather not participate. We don't really consider the studying abroad as a major factor in the decision. Our criteria is much more behavioral and specific to skills we need, not general characteristics of potential employees.*
- *We are not an international business so there is no need for us to question applicants of possible study abroad experiences; therefore we request to refrain from participating in your study.*
- *Study abroad or international travel does not factor into our interview or recruitment practices. Our company does not wish to participate in this study.*
- *International exposure is not a determining factor in our hiring practice. We are not good candidates for your study.*
- *The opportunity to study abroad or travel abroad is very much a privilege at the collegiate level but our company does not assess any value or added weight to candidates with this on their resume. It does not impact their interviews. We do not think we fit the criteria to answer this survey.*

There were four (15.0%) respondents who felt their companies were too small or had limited resources to participate in this study. Their responses paralleled one another. Typically the answers referred to the lack of manpower or the size of the organization.

- *Thank you for contacting our company regarding this valuable research study opportunity. At this time we do not have the resources to participate and need to decline.*

Of those companies willing to participate, many answered the initial questions similarly. The first question asked for descriptions about the resume or application process in an attempt to determine how companies screen prior to the interview phase (Table 1).

**Table 1. Steps Taken When Applications or Resumes Are Received By Human Resources and Recruiters.**

Action taken	Percent
Job requirements met or exceeded, i.e. age, location, experience, skills	93.7%
Scanned for education and previous job experience	81.0%
Clarity of Intentions, Is the resume presentable and professional?	73.0%
Searched for key words	66.7%
Reviewed for grammatical errors	47.6%
n=63	

In response to the question about application status and the actions taken respondents said that most hiring managers were looking for a particular skill set and/or educational equivalence. Almost half (47.6%) of companies review for grammatical errors and if the cover letter or resume are incorrect the resume will be thrown out and that person is no longer in contention. Recruiters and hiring managers (93.7%) look to assure the applicant meets standard requirements set in the job description. Human resources looks to see if age, education level, experience and skills set all combine to meet the expectations of a particular job description. Some representative responses to the question illustrate what recruiters look for in a resume.

- *Has previous experience that would qualify and enable them to perform the task.*
- *Reviewed for spelling/grammatical errors, and then qualifying resumes are then re-reviewed for relevant work experience, education etc. The final step is interviewing candidates.*

- *Educational background, work history (including tenure), as well as attention to detail (consistent formatting of the resume), and writing skills.*
- *Education and experience*
- *Meets the minimum qualifications.*
- *Balance between scholastic achievement, work experience, and extracurricular activities that demonstrate a willingness to work with people.*
- *Confidence, clarity of career intentions and truthfulness*
- *Compared to the requirements of a particular job.*
- *Resume is scanned into company national database allowing for search on key words.*
- *The recruiter reviews the resume to see if the applicant is qualified.*
- *We have a success profile for all our major entry-level positions and we look for traits/skills that match that profile.*
- *A review/selection process is performed for the top 30 candidates and then the top resumes are reviewed. Look for proven performance results in a variety of areas.*
- *Resumes are reviewed and compared to the requirements of a particular job. If there is a good match, the resumes are passed on to the hiring managers for review and then scheduled interviews.*

Follow up questions about resumes were asked to identify if a point system existed and to determine if certain characteristics or traits made a more valuable impression to hiring managers implying applicants would make it to the interview stage. The majority (87.3%) of the study participants do not use a point-system to determine whether or not the applicant will be interviewed (Table 2).

**Table 2: Point System Developed for the Resume Process**

<b>Point System for Hiring</b>	<b>Percent Reporting</b>
Yes	12.7%
No	87.3%
n=63	

Only eight companies used a point system during the resume process. At these companies the interviewees described that certain traits or characteristics are identified and given specific values. All of the organizations who mentioned that this was standard in their resume practice said the reason there was a point system was in play was attributed to the high volume of resumes they received. Respondents reported that having a set point system streamlined the hiring process; resumes received that do not meet minimum standards on the point scale are disregarded.

The first objective of this study was to develop a comprehensive listing of character traits and personal gains that students who participate in study abroad have claimed to possess once they return from international trips abroad (from secondary data sources) and to determine whether these coincide with the desires of corporate recruiters/hiring managers. The literature reviewed for this chapter listed the following attributes students feel they gained from their experiences abroad. This list is comprised using 30 articles where the most repeated responses by students were as follows:

*Students Listed:*

- Enhanced Communication Skills
- Cultural Awareness
- Leadership abilities
- Working with other people on common goals
- Global mindedness/awareness
- Risk-taking
- Attentiveness

- Goals and Desires became clearer/focused
- Matured them as individuals
- Foreign Language Proficiency
- New found self-confidence
- Enhanced concern for international affairs
- Independence and self-reliance
- Self-aware, culturally aware of American heritage

While there usually was not a point system for ranking resumes, at most of the organizations respondents were looking for specific traits and characteristics that made applicants stand out. Corporate recruiters and hiring managers were asked to describe what they are trained to look for in a potential employee (Table 3). The most desired trait was good communication skills, 91.4% of respondents claimed this was pertinent during the interview phase. Other popular characteristics hiring managers' desire were consistent work history with a good work ethic and integrity. Also recruiters look for team-oriented applicants who also have leadership skills.

The results of the comparative analysis between the literature review and the survey provided a connection between the top three attributes which were enhanced communication skills, cultural awareness and leadership abilities. Both students and recruiters felt those skills were important characteristics to have as part of their repertoire when applying for a position. The next set of traits that included consistent work history, work ethic and integrity were all listed as character traits recruiters found important. These traits are all in application to the work or specific job related activities. However, of the remaining desired traits and characteristics there are four more that coincide with those listed by students in the literature reviewed. Students and recruiters both mentioned being team-oriented, risk-takers, the desire to excel and a heightened level of

maturity. Of the thirteen character traits mentioned most often by the recruiters, seven of those traits were synonymous to those listed by students in the various literature that was reviewed.

**Table 3. Characteristics and Personality Traits Mentioned by Recruiters as Important for Future Consideration.**

<b>Desired Characteristics/Personality Traits</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Good Communication Skills	91.4%
Culturally Aware	87.3%
Leadership Skills or Experience	85.6%
Consistent Work History/Experience	81.4%
Work Ethic	67.5%
Integrity	65.8%
Team-oriented	62.7%
Risk-Takers	49.2%
Attentiveness	43.8%
Desire to Excel/Focused/Driven	32.0%
Positive Attitude	28.6%
Maturity	27.3%
Technical Expertise	15.7%
n=63	

The following excerpts from recruiters and human resource hiring managers are descriptions of traits, skill sets, competencies and characteristics they felt important potential employees should possess.

- *Candidate must be able to think on his/her feet, with well thought out and calculated responses to the questions asked.*
- *Aside from technical requirements, we want team-oriented individuals with a good work ethic and good communication skills. We need highly motivated, self-starters*
- *We look for entrepreneurial spirit and someone who can prove their past successes.*
- *We are looking for technical expertise, communication skills, documentation skills, presentation ability and a desire to excel in all they do.*

- *Recruiters are encouraged to compare the candidate's education, experience, and training to the minimum qualifications listed on our job posting.*
- *Individuals who are understanding, hard-working and good communicators.*
- *Personal attributes—you know, whatever it takes their attitude, are they a team player, a good communicator.*
- *We are seeking mature individuals who have experience and a strong interest in working in a variety of situations. We are looking for strong academic achievement and for individuals who use good judgment. Interpersonal skills are a must.*
- *We are looking for leaders who exemplify performance and proven results in many different areas. Positive attitude, leadership skills-courage, trust and commitment, Maturity-Inclusion, Flexibility, Teamwork, Integrity-Honesty, Mutual Respect, Character*
- *Our recruiters and interviewers are going to look for good attention to detail, initiative, judgment, teamwork, as well as the ability to produce quality work.*
- *A willingness to learn and compatibility to our [corporate] culture.*
- *Sales, customer service, leadership, flexibility, work ethic, team oriented*
- *We look for job stability, proof of success in the position, education and skills that relate to our job.*
- *High energy, knowledge our company and sector and products, leadership, attentiveness, outside activities, demonstration*
- *Our recruiters and interviewers are going to look for good attention to detail, initiative, judgment, teamwork, as well as the ability to produce quality work.*
- *Confidence, clarity of career intentions, boldness in speaking, truthfulness*
- *We look for skills, past experiences, longevity in previous positions and reasons for leaving; educational background, continuing educational experiences, communication skills both written and verbal; life learning experiences.*

- *Emphasis is placed on the degree, in major gpa and overall gpa, degree related work experience (internship or co-op), co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, leadership experience, honors and awards. These are not weighted but are evaluated in the order listed.*
- *Qualifications, experience, education, other experiences that would give some indication of applicants other interests that might benefit the job.*

The first objective of the study was to develop a comprehensive listing of the character traits and personal gains students who participate in study abroad have claimed to possess once they return from international trips abroad (from secondary data sources), this was derived from the review of literature in chapter 2. An additional component of this objective was to determine whether the characteristics students felt they'd gained coincided with the desires of corporate recruiters/hiring managers.

The second objective of the study was to determine if and how a corporate criterion is used to evaluate study abroad/international travel experiences on resumes and during interviews. The survey question following the recruitment question was designed to determine whether or not study abroad was incorporated into the interview or hiring process. Respondents reported that most of the time there was not a direct question pertaining to study abroad or international travel experience during the interview process, there were questions about extracurricular activities or life-defining moments in their college career that often were answered with some sort of international experience (Table 4).

**Table 4: Study Abroad or International Travel Is or Is Not a Topic of Conversation During Interviews**

<b>Study Abroad/ International Travel Part of Interview</b>	<b>Percent Citing</b>
No	66.3%
No, not specifically.	12.4%
Yes	2.2%
Yes, if it is an international position.	11.2%
Yes, if we ask students about personal experiences in college	3.4%
Yes, if we're looking for them to travel	4.5%
n=89	100.0%

While most of the recruiters specifically don't ask about study abroad or international travel experience during interviews 78.7% several of the respondent's answered that the topic of study abroad or international travel is part of their interviews (23.2%). Examples of this can be seen in a sample of their answers.

- *Interesting experiences that come up in the interview may indicate openness to alternative approaches to a job.*
- *It comes up when we ask about the candidate's experience.*
- *I encourage my recruiters and managers to seek out people who are going to go above and beyond and not afraid to take risks.*
- *We ask about travel and willingness to relocate, this is usually an open door for candidates to explore and explain past experiences they've had with travel.*
- *We are interested in these experiences for candidates who apply to work with our international program and has completed a study abroad or travel experience in the country where a field study is located, we discuss this during the interview.*
- *The recruiter will touch on these experiences if noted on the applicant's resume. The recruiter will ask open ended questions such as what the applicant learned, what they had to overcome, what stretched them, or*

*what they took away from the experience, etc., again, if noted on the resume.*

- *International experience is a plus in some marketing jobs and strategic planning jobs.*
- *Questioning extra-curricular activities is encouraged. As well, we'll occasionally ask a candidate to tell us something about him/herself that we may not know from his/her resume, or something that has been a major influence on his/her life up to this point.*
- *We believe that travel expands an individual's perspective of the world. Travel and experiencing diversity help shape our identity and those who have had the privilege of visiting foreign countries also have the privilege of experiencing other cultures. Awareness of cultural diversity and respect for others are among the most valuable traits.*
- *Employers will ask if they want to share additional information about an experience they believe applies to the particular job.*
- *Not a standard question, but does come out often when asking other questions.*
- *No, but surprisingly if it is on their resume there is some point during the interview where the topic is discussed.*

The next set of questions participants were asked did not relate to company policies or corporate hiring standards. Questions posed were about their personal opinion of study abroad and international travel experiences. The initial question tried to arouse each individual's idea when they heard the terms study abroad or international travel. Responses varied and the attitude and opinions of study abroad reflected both a very academic perspective and the belief that study abroad was a four to six week sojourn from the real world. Similar terminology was used frequently in many of the answers given by participants (Table 5).

**Table 5: Images and Attributes the Term Study Abroad Evokes**

<b>Image or Attribute</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Immersion in another culture/cultural experiences	83.2%
Well-rounded in education/life	68.4%
Foreign Language Abilities/Fluency	63.5%
Willingness to take challenges, Outgoing	58.3%
Personal Growth	52.6%
Experience new things, risk takers	46.8%
A semester or more abroad with an academic institution	38.5%
Flexibility to travel and move	33.4%
2-3 months abroad where credit is earned	29.8%
Affluent Students	1.4%
n=63	

The term study abroad evoked a variety of opinions from the recruiters and hiring managers interviewed. Their responses described their perceptions of the terms study abroad and international travel. Some answers were related to specific student attributes gained and other respondents answered with broader, more generic opinions about the overall study abroad idea or traveling internationally. The following are a sample of respondent answers:

- *It is an added value for the candidate because it broadens their range of experiences and helps them understand the need for diversity in the business world.*
- *Opportunity for a student to study in a different country, giving them the opportunity to learn about a different culture.*
- *I think of a student who has traveled to another country for a semester or more to attend school and immerse themselves in another culture.*
- *Proactive, willingness to take on a challenge and experience new things.*
- *Students have taken an interest and active part in broadening their own backgrounds and experiences outside the U.S.*

- *A great educational opportunity for a student to experience a new culture, way to learn and personal growth.*
- *A person who is extremely bright and who has a lot of initiative and energy.*
- *Study abroad has a connotation of linkage with a college or university program.*
- *It is an incredible opportunity to gain new perspectives on both social and academic areas of interest.*
- *Cultural enlightenment and expanding horizons*
- *Someone who is interested in diversity, traveling, and learning in a cross-cultural environment.*
- *Living with a family completely submerged in a different culture.*
- *We have many of our employees who gained their academic training abroad in cross functional capacity either through rotational assignments which allowed them on the job study or in academia which allow them the technical expertise of technologies used in our organization.*
- *I think of a student who is broadminded, willing to take risks, and interested to learn about other cultures.*
- *Terrific opportunity, shows initiative and persistence in seeking it out and pursuing it.*
- *Study abroad brings to mind some sort of extended stay (1 month to one year) in another country where English is not the primary language and the purpose of the stint is for cultural/language or educational learning and is not viewed as a vacation.*

After recruiters were asked about their thoughts on study abroad, the next question posed was if the hiring manager personally had studied abroad and if so, where. Answers to this question were mostly yes or no, however there were a few with additional comments (Table 6).

**Table 6: Personal Study Abroad Experience**

<b>Participated in Study Abroad</b>	<b>Percent Citing</b>
No	47.6%
No, but wish I had	12.7%
No, but have family/friends who did	6.3%
No, but I want my kids to	4.8%
Yes	28.6%
n=63	100.0%

While more than 70% of respondents did not participate in a study abroad over 20% of those wished they had, or want their children to. The percentage that reported they had studied abroad typically went to European countries. Locations cited by some respondents included Florence and Rome, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, Ireland and Belgium. Those citing countries not in Europe mentioned Australia, Brazil, China and Japan.

The next set of questions on the open-ended survey were opinion questions about possible character traits and personal growth that students who choose to study abroad may possess and would ultimately be beneficial to organizations and companies. The first question asked what character traits people who study abroad may have (Table 7) and the follow-up question asked of those character traits did the hiring manager see any of them as added value for their business.

Most respondents answered this question by listing multiple character traits. Again, some answers were very general and others were very site specific depending on the types of jobs for which hiring managers were recruiting.

**Table 7: Characteristics of Study Abroad Participants Companies See as Valuable.**

Potential Characteristics	Percent
Self Confident/Outgoing	89.5%
Ability to adapt	81.0%
Global Mindset	80.4%
Cultural Awareness	79.4%
Open-minded	71.4%
Appreciation for Differences	68.3%
Leadership skills	52.4%
Risk Takers	52.4%
Interpersonal Communication	44.4%
Language Skills	44.4%
Well-Rounded	42.9%
n=63	

Many of the answers addressed character traits and personal attributes gained while studying abroad and not necessarily technical skills one may have gained on an internship abroad or work abroad program. Respondents' answers focused on international study experience of living and learning outside of the United States. Various responses included:

- *We do business internationally, so it could benefit our company by having someone who understands some of our partners' cultures, trends, and language.*
- *Yes-I think anytime you are overseas (and are successful overseas) you show that you can appreciate differences in people and still work toward a common goal.*
- *Adaptable, self sufficient, open to learning; the business world requires that we adapt and learn constantly.*
- *They know more about other areas of how to conduct business rather than just the American way—they have diversity which adds value to a team.*
- *I would expect that an individual with that background/experience would have better than average analytical skills, communication skills and the ability to “think outside the box” and be open to and cultivate new ideas.*

- *Appreciation of other cultures, patience with communication barriers, experience living in a stressful situation (language/cultural barriers)*
- *Someone who has studied abroad would seem more well-rounded and have the ability to see things in a bigger picture than someone who has not had the chance to study abroad.*
- *A characteristic we could possibly assume is that they are a fairly competent individual who is confident and resourceful enough to handle themselves in unfamiliar environments.*
- *Could help in determining the chemistry of applicant fitting into the organization. Demonstrates applicant's willingness to extend themselves to broaden their background and education.*
- *I feel like most people with this type of experience are not afraid to walk into a room full of strangers and begin working in any situation. This is a valuable tool to have in the business world.*
- *Respect for cultural differences is the primary characteristic. Secondly, the candidate may have an understanding of the various laws that govern the way a country does business with the U.S.*
- *I am also head of all expatriate services and work with all of our foreign nationals. So I am versed with diversity of cultures and experiences. The more knowledge and experiences a person has in this day of global technology, the more advantage they possess PROVIDED they also have the drive and passion to perform as an employee.*
- *Interest in different cultures. Receptive to different cultures. Possibly possessing multiple language skills.*
- *Initiative, flexibility, may learn to deal with situations on the spot, intellectual, cultural curiosity that others might not have.*
- *I would imagine that these candidates would have rich cultural experience enabling them to work effectively with our diverse student population. I would also expect them to be flexible and able to adjust to conditions that are perhaps not always ideal, which is often the case with our programs.*
- *Outgoing, open-minded, willing to put themselves in unknown situations, willingness to learn.*
- *Insight as to how important it is to learn how to communicate with every customer/person as each person has buying power.*

- *Well rounded individual who adapts well to different environments, and has the skills to work with a wide range of different people.*
- *This experience could benefit our company for international positions or domestic positions that support international platforms. Even for positions where this experience is not required, a candidate with this experience often has a broader business perspective compared to a global candidate who does not have this experience. In addition, we need to have a global mindset as our Company, as well as corporate America in general, is growing our international platforms.*
- *That person may bring initiative, flexibility, deal with situations on the spot, intellectual, cultural curiosity that others might not have as well as appreciation for diversity.*

Respondents were asked to cite specific examples of experiences that would benefit and play a pivotal role in the evaluation process of resumes and applicant portfolios. Many answered this question with similar answers to previous questions. Respondents' answers that were repetitious included interviewees having cultural diversity, good communication skills, good attitude and quick thinking. On more than one occasion the respondent referred to the previous question on their opinion of beneficial qualities one might gain from studying abroad, so there were times when the answer, see question #7 was the response (Table 8). Respondents repeatedly used cultural diversity and cross-cultural communication skills as two very beneficial attributes study abroad experiences could potentially offer students. Also, seven of the eleven potential characteristics companies claimed to see as valuable matched traits listed by students in the literature.

**Table 8: Experiences that Would Benefit the Applicant and Would Enter Into the Evaluation Process**

<b>Experiences</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Acceptance/appreciation of other cultures	84.1%
Ability to work with diverse group of people	82.5%
Overcoming communication barriers	79.4%
Language proficiencies	74.6%
Ability to think on your feet	63.5%
Adapting to new environment	47.6%
See Questions #7	31.7%
Willingness to extend themselves	28.6%
n=63	

Most hiring personnel offered their opinion of several experiences associated with study abroad where they felt a student could gain skills that would make them more viable candidates during the interview process. Samples of those responses are:

- *The ability to work with a diverse group of people, communication skills, office skills including ability to take on and complete tasks, patience and the ability to think on your feet.*
- *Communicating with people who have different backgrounds or perspectives.*
- *Being able to adapt to unfamiliar surroundings/environments or people is always a good trait to have.*
- *We have to have employees who are capable of adjusting with the resources we have on hand. These candidates more than likely are resourceful and are willing to extend themselves in a variety of ways, be it language or working with different types of individuals.*
- *As businesses continue to expand internationally, we cannot assume we can conduct business overseas as we conduct business in the United States. These employees' characteristics would enhance conducting business with our international customers as well as an expatriate working with local associates.*

- *It gives the applicant better exposure and experience to be able to do the job. Maturity, probably willing to accept more responsibility and they have a willingness to extend themselves.*
- *Employees who interact with people from different cultures should have an appreciation for the differences they are dealing with. Language skills are always helpful. I think the more aligned the person's background and study abroad experience align with the job related needs of the potential job the better.*
- *Experiences where they need to think and be personally responsible for their actions.*
- *Adapting to different cultures, local law and understanding business in another country. All other things being equal, the company is getting a better rounded individual.*
- *A varied approach to problem-solving and relationship building will be essential in a successful management career in our company as well as in the business world in general.*
- *As we expand our business into other markets, experience in those markets can be beneficial. We also like to hire applicants who have respect and regard for other cultures.*
- *Proficiency in any foreign language is a valuable skill, but having a deeper understanding of a culture is far more rewarding because it opens the door to solid relationships.*
- *Flexibility and the ability to adapt to different circumstances are important because employees have a variety of tasks and often work with teams of people. Study abroad helps candidates to have different reference points during discussions or brainstorming sessions.*
- *We have found that individuals who display leadership skills, teamwork abilities (work well with others), communication skills, incorporate inclusion, display passion and a positive attitude, integrity and the ability to produce results in all they do are proven performers no matter what task you give them.*
- *It is important for individuals to work well independently as well as in a team environment, which may be comprised of individuals from a diverse background.*

- *The ability to assimilate new languages, cultures, ideas; being flexible enough to handle last minute changes; take in consideration that there is more than one way to handle an idea or situation.*
- *More and more domestic businesses are seeing the need for bilingual candidates in order to appeal to a broader and growing demographic.*
- *The most valuable characteristic I see of someone that has studied abroad is the willingness to immerse oneself in another country that is outside of their comfort zone. They must overcome both cultural and language barriers to co-exist and interact with individuals that are in many ways the same, but also in many ways, drastically different. It is that teachable nature and recognition that there is something to learn from other nations, other people, other cultures that will be an asset to ANY working environment.*

## **CONCLUSION**

The preceding sections offered an analysis of the data collected for this study. The analysis was based on the objectives, research questions and the research hypothesis of the study. Several patterns emerged in the answers by respondents. Several questions had duplicate and similar responses. Based on the responses there were instances when sample respondents chose not to answer a question and commented that they had answered a similar question previously in the questionnaire. Many of the questions were asking about procedures and traits and skills, but the questions were not repetitious, they were asking for different responses. Key words and terms were repeated as each question was asked and over one half of the sixty three respondents mentioned the same qualities, characteristics or traits. Many of the human resource managers and recruiters had similar opinions as well. Study results indicated that studying abroad and the international travel experience associated with it *does* give potential employees enriched skills or character traits that employers

look for in the interview process. Although, while the research indicated that beneficial character traits developed as a result of a student's international experience, research results established that hiring professionals do not make the connection between studying abroad and being a more valuable employee than individuals interviewing without international experiences. Most respondents do not discuss study abroad unless prompted by students during interviews.

Company standards and policies varied on the exact approach used at each company after resumes are received however once a resume is approved for the next level, many of the hiring managers are looking for the same skill sets and qualifications. There were eighteen individuals (28.6%) interviewed who had personal experience studying abroad. That number is much larger than the general student population who studies abroad in college today. Across American college campuses less than one percent of students study abroad. The percentage of participants who studied abroad during their college years is much higher than current average student population's participation. It is surprising that a similar percentage of hiring managers, at least one out of four, would not ask students to reflect on these kinds of experiences during the hiring processes of companies. Regardless of the company or corporation interviewed in this study, the character traits of future employees were synonymous to those sought out by professionals in completely different fields.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study was to determine if study abroad and the international travel experiences associated with studying abroad give job applicants a competitive edge in the hiring practices of corporations. The conclusions and recommendations in this chapter are based on study objectives and results.

#### **OBJECTIVE ONE**

Objective one of this study was to develop a comprehensive listing of the character traits and personal gains students who participate in study abroad claim to possess once they return from international trips abroad and to determine whether these coincide with the desires of corporate recruiters/hiring managers. The literature review presented the views of many authors who determined, described and discussed the many facets to studying abroad. Study abroad encompasses several broad topics some include length of time, destination selection, and intentions for the trip. The research surrounding student behavior illustrates that there are specific skills sets and character traits that develop from these international experiences. Students interviewed in multiple studies cited key behaviors and personality characteristics that were enhanced as a direct result of studying abroad. The most common responses in previous studies were that students felt much more culturally aware after

returning from abroad. Students gained an enhanced concern for international affairs; they had a greater focus on global mindedness and awareness. There was a sense of cultural identity that had been defined while living in another country. Many students claimed they had a broader appreciation for differences of language and practices, some students even learned about new religions. Language proficiency was a skill students who studied in non-English speaking countries possessed once they returned home. Students also revealed they had a new found sense of self-confidence and leadership abilities. When students are immersed in an international environment with such unfamiliarity it often makes students more assertive, independent and self-reliant. Studies also claim that individuals return to the United States more mature with more defined goals and objectives for their lives after college.

This study results concluded that recruiters and hiring managers at many companies have similar expectations for characteristics they desire their employees to possess. Study respondents cited qualities they look for in the interview stages of hiring and many of the traits they desire their employees to have are traits that students who study abroad feel they possess. Study results showed that hiring professionals are looking for ambitious, independent, self-reliant, excellent communicators who are open-minded and culturally aware. Corporate recruiters are also interested in hiring mature individuals who they feel have the abilities to exemplify the ideals of the company's mission. The literature review determined that students feel they gain the following character traits as a result of studying abroad: global mindedness/awareness, foreign language proficiency, a new found self-confidence, enhanced concern for international

affairs, independence and self-reliance, leadership abilities, risk-taking, they became more self-aware and culturally aware, it matured them as individuals, enhanced their communication skills and their goals and desires became clearer and more focused. Corporate hiring managers were looking for over half of these personality and professional qualities during the interview phases of hiring. Managers cited good communication skills (91.4%), leadership skills (85.6%), team-oriented individuals (62.7%), risk-takers (49.2%), attentiveness (43.8%), an individual with a strong desire to excel, focused and driven (32.0%), mature (27.3%), culturally aware and diverse (87.3%) all as defining character traits beneficial when interviewed.

Human resource professionals also listed a consistent work history/experience (81.4%), work ethic (67.5%), integrity (65.8%), positive attitude (28.6%) and technical expertise (15.7%) as additional characteristics they look for in potential employees. The other personal qualities students felt they'd gained from their experience abroad were: foreign language proficiency, new found self-confidence, and enhanced concern for international affairs.

However, the fact remains, eight of the thirteen character traits corporate recruiters and hiring managers reported to desire in applicants are synonymous with personal gains students who study abroad feel they possess. If students and recruiters identify many of the same character traits, then why are questions not being asked regarding international study experiences during interviews?

## **OBJECTIVE TWO**

Objective two of this study was to determine how corporate criteria are used to evaluate study abroad/international travel experiences on resumes and during interviews. The study showed that in most cases there are no corporate criteria used to evaluate study abroad or international travel experiences. Most recruiters and hiring managers only ask about these experiences if the job requires travel or international exposure in some form or fashion, for example if the company is international. Very few of the companies interviewed have trained their recruiters or hiring managers to evaluate study abroad experiences as noteworthy. On multiple occasions in this study, respondents said that study abroad was discussed but it was typically when students used an international experience to illustrate an example during their interview.

The number of those professional recruiters or hiring managers who personally studied abroad, which was 28.6% percent interviewed, was much higher than the national average of students who participate in study abroad programs, which is a little more than 1.0% of college students. While eighteen respondents had personal study abroad experience, 12.7% wished they had studied abroad while they were in college and it is a desire of 6.3% of respondents that their children study abroad in the future. Over fifty percent of respondents have studied abroad, wanted to study abroad and regret they did not or want their kids too. These percentages reflect a great interest in international study abroad. But according to study results, the recruiters' personal international backgrounds did not influence the interview process because on average there are not questions regarding study abroad or

international travel experiences asked. Despite personal experiences and opinions noted in this study about international study abroad experiences by the respondents, the majority of corporate recruiters never ask about study abroad during interviews.

### **OBJECTIVE THREE**

Objective three of this study was to develop conclusions from the personal interviews and questionnaires regarding study abroad and the international experiences associated with it and employability. It was concluded from the research that while companies do not have a policy or operate using standard procedures that include study abroad or international travel questions as part of the interview process, the qualities they are seeking are qualities of individuals with those experiences.

The research question asked if there is an implicit link between experiential learning, which takes place abroad, and traits valued by employers. Does study abroad and the international travel experience associated with it enhance skills that employers look for during interviews? The study yielded results that showed employers are seeking specific skill sets in future employees and based on the literature review most students who return from studying abroad possess those skill sets or skills have been enhanced from their experiences in a foreign country. Respondents claimed that skills, especially those gained from work abroad experiences, make strong impressions to recruiters during the hiring phase of employment. One research question asked if study abroad and the international travel associated with it enhance character

traits that employers look for during interviews? The evidence is that employers list similar character traits and skills as desirable to those found after reviewing the literature students claimed to possess as a direct result of traveling internationally. Further research indicated that employers are not incorporating questions about study abroad in their interview phases of hiring. Students are gaining skills employers have cited as important and valuable in potential employees, but recruiters and hiring managers are not realizing the connection between studying abroad and assets someone with study abroad experience can bring to their company.

Employers are looking for a combination of life skills, educational background and personal qualities that make up their ideal employee. Corporations look for well rounded individuals who will emulate the ideals of their company. A review of the literature provided examples and explanations to the benefits of living and learning in another country and culture and defined the many ways an individual grows during such an experience. Results of this study show that over 60% of the characteristics companies claimed to seek in potential employees were cited by students in the study abroad literature. The relationship between studying abroad and traits gained needs to be emphasized to the business world because as this study shows that companies are looking for traits that study abroad professionals feel their students possess.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations in this section are based on interaction between human resource directors, hiring managers and campus recruiters during the interview process of this study.

From the literature reviewed and suggestions made by college officials on school websites as well as study abroad foundations and organizations, it is obvious that educators are convinced of the value of study abroad and the international experiences it provides. The personal, professional and academic benefits this experiential learning potentially has on students cannot be compared to classrooms on an American campus. However, the results of this study indicate that while industry professionals appreciate many of the benefits of an international experience, they don't necessarily make the connection to the study abroad experience. Therefore, it is the responsibility of education professionals to boost their efforts to persuade industry of the value of international experiences. Recruiters and hiring professionals do not seem to recognize the connection between study abroad and the enhanced personal and professional character traits a student gains from such an experience.

Educators have the capability to teach professionals about the value study abroad experience really has on a resume. While educators and human resource professionals both identify the same skill sets and qualities necessary to be successful, hiring managers are not making the explicit connection between study abroad and student attributes. There needs to be a change in the behavior of human resource professionals because based on the results from this study show the impact that study abroad has on participants. Their recruitment and

hiring processes need to include questions about study abroad and the international travel experiences associated with them. Educators could use undergraduate education as an avenue to present and inform future hiring managers about the benefits of studying abroad.

There should be guidelines in place for recruiters and hiring managers could be trained so that during the interviewing processes study abroad or international travel experience should be a topic of discussion. Human resources professionals and corporate recruiters are trained to look for specific character traits, skills sets and qualifications on a resume. The same attention should be given to study abroad experiences on resumes or in the interview stages.

Past research shows that hiring professionals don't pay much attention to study abroad but this study reveals that it's the character traits and enhanced personal and professional skills that derive from these experiences that managers should and in many cases are addressing in interviews. Private and public organizations should encourage company policy to reflect this. Now, more than ever, companies are working on a global scale and in international markets. Companies have expanded and have international branches and partners in all different industries. Students who have had international exposure through studying abroad or traveling will automatically adjust and adapt because they've done it before, it becomes an additional ability in their skill set.

It is also important that college campuses recruit more than 1.0% of its students for study abroad programs. There needs to be movement by the administration and study abroad offices at the university level that emphasizes to students of all majors and interests that regardless of the length of time, one

month, one semester or one year, students need to spend time abroad. Colleges are preparing students for their futures, and without graduating culturally aware, global minded, mature, independent students with excellent communication skills the schools are not fully preparing graduates to compete for at a professional level.

Study abroad offices need to change their behavior as well. While making claims about resume building and the potential these experiences have to enhance a student's career prospects, these offices should be making companies aware of the benefits they would receive by hiring a student who has studied abroad.

Not only are colleges and universities responsible for encouraging more interest in study abroad programs, but schools and international exchange organizations need to lobby for legislation for more funding for overseas international exchange and study abroad programs. There are many students who desire the opportunity for an experience abroad, but they do not have funding to do so (Lane 2003). Funding is a crucial element for participation in studying abroad. The local, state and federal governments need to establish benchmarks and standards that include a minimum number of scholarships and grants allowing for a specific number of college students to study internationally. International programs and education abroad should be an integral part of their education platforms. "Regardless of which decade students studied abroad, the academic, career, intercultural, and personal/social benefits were statistically significant, powerful, and enduring. This has policy implications for the support of study abroad by U.S. colleges, parents and employers" (Dwyer 2004, p. 20).

Results from this study show that more articles and literature need to be published explicitly identifying the benefits of studying abroad so that employers and human resource professionals can more clearly make the connection. Educators and corporate recruiters need to have open lines of communication so that the value of international education will be realized.

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTENT

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

You have been selected as an informed contact to participate in a study between the National Travel Association and the Student and Youth National Association in conjunction with North Carolina State University to share your company's views regarding travel abroad experiences and its value to potential employees. I would like the opportunity to meet and speak with you about your company's position. *I will be calling you in the next few days to get your permission and arrange for a time to meet for this interview.*

If you agree to participate in my study, I'll ask to interview you for about 15 minutes. The interview questions will pertain to your knowledge about study abroad programs, and how you might view study abroad experience in job applicants. If you're interested in hearing more about my project, please feel free to contact me.

I look forward to further correspondence.

Sincerely,

Ivy Peacock  
Graduate Research Assistant  
North Carolina State University  
[jipeacoc@ncsu.edu](mailto:jipeacoc@ncsu.edu)  
919-961-5949

## APPENDIX B: EMAIL OF INTENT

Dear Mr. / Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

Earlier this month you should have received a letter regarding the selection of your company to participate in a study between the National Travel Association and the Student and Youth National Association in conjunction with North Carolina State University to share your company's views regarding potential employees, hiring practices and the role study abroad or international travel experiences may play in the selection process.

I would like the opportunity to have you or a hiring manager fill out a 10 question survey about your company's hiring practices that defines whether your company has any position regarding study abroad or international travel by potential candidates.

If you agree to participate in my study, I'll ask for about 15 minutes of your time. The survey questions pertain to your knowledge about job applicants, employee traits and your hiring process. If you're interested in hearing more about my project, please feel free to contact me.

I look forward to further correspondence.

Sincerely,

Ivy Peacock  
North Carolina State University  
Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management  
Graduate Research Assistant

Phone: 919-515-9571  
Fax: 919-515-3687

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

1. In the resume evaluation process what are the steps taken once an application or resume is received?
  - a.) Are there weights given to specific characteristics or traits of the potential employee?
  - b) Does a point system exist?
2. What are your company's recruiters/interviewers encouraged or trained to look for in potential employees?
3. Are study abroad or international travel experiences incorporated into the interviewing or hiring process?
  - a.) Are the interviewers trained to ask specific questions about these experiences?
4. If yes, then what weight is given to this experience on their resume?
  - a.) How is that experience evaluated? Via the point system or automatic first round interviews or other ways?
5. When you hear study abroad what comes to mind?
6. Do you personally have study abroad experience?
7. What is your opinion, with a generic applicant in mind, of someone who has study abroad or international travel experiences—what characteristics could they possess that you see as valuable?
8. Do you see a candidate or a potential employee with study abroad/international travel experience benefiting your company in any way? How?
9. Could you list examples of experiences a potential employee might have that would be beneficial to your company?
  - a.) What traits do you feel a person gains from these types of experiences?
10. Do you feel there are any applicant traits or characteristics that enter into evaluation process which may be influenced by having a study abroad or travel abroad experience?
  - a.) What are these traits or characteristics?
  - b.) Would an applicant who has these traits or characteristics be beneficial to your company?
  - c.) Why is it important for a potential employee to have those traits?