

4-1-2016

## Motivations to Study Abroad: A Case Study of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program

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### Recommended Citation

Beseli, A. L., Warner, W. J., Kirby, B. M., & Jones, D. W. (2016). Motivations to Study Abroad: A Case Study of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 23(1), 48-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5191/jiaee.2016.23104>

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the student participants' motivations to partake in a short-term study abroad experience. This was an observational case study of the North Carolina State University College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program with the 2014 program student participants. The study explored student participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program. This study found students were motivated to participate in a short-term study abroad program because of the short-term length aspect, the completion of course credits, and encouragement from other people, both other students and faculty

### Keywords

Study abroad, Short-term study abroad, Student Motivations, International Experiences

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doi:10.5191/jiaee.2016.23104

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the student participants' motivations to partake in a short-term study abroad experience. This was an observational case study of the North Carolina State University College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program with the 2014 program student participants. The study explored student participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program. This study found students were motivated to participate in a short-term study abroad program because of the short-term length aspect, the completion of course credits, and encouragement from other people, both other students and faculty.*

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### **Introduction**

Our society is developing an increasingly international focus, requiring people within the university to globalize in order to stay current (Nehrt, 1993). According to many scholars, globalizing undergraduate education programs is gaining importance (Bruening & Frick, 2004a) and all undergraduate students need to have a strong international experience before they graduate (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges [NASULGC], 1997). In order to improve student success and enhance student engagement, Kuh (2008) stated universities must, “make it possible for every single student to participate in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field” (p. 21). One high-impact educational activity Kuh speaks of is diversity/global learning.

The main goal of international education is to produce graduates with global perspectives (Pickert, 1992). One component of international education is study abroad (Tritz & Martin, 1997). Brooks, Frick, and Bruening (2006) suggested colleges of agriculture should consider the importance of study abroad and consider making it a mandatory experience for all students. Studying abroad is the best way for undergraduate students to gain international perspectives in agricultural studies programs (Brooks, Frick, & Bruening, 2006). Briers, Shinn and Nguyen (2010) stated faculty should be focused on creating and organizing experiences to provide global opportunities.

Briers et al. (2010) found students are most motivated to participate in an international experience based on how much the international experience will contribute to their overall life experience. Having the

opportunity to live in another country or culture was also a motivating factor for students. Furthermore, students were motivated to study abroad since international experiences look attractive on resumes (Briers et al., 2010). Jarvis and Peel (2008) completed a study inquiring about students’ motivations to study in another country. The top motivations revealed were: the wish to broaden their awareness of the world, the desire to travel and study in another country for a long time, the wish to meet new people, and the desire to experience another culture (Jarvis & Peel, 2008). Other motivations included: studying abroad seemed like a challenging experience, they wanted a change from their everyday home life, they heard positive comments from friends about studying abroad, and lastly they viewed it as a way to enhance their career opportunities (Jarvis & Peel, 2008).

International experiences help students understand other cultures while widening their worldview by showing them their previous perceptions and understanding of other countries and cultures were narrow (Bruening & Frick, 2004b; Zhai & Scheer, 2002). Participants in a study by Kasravi (2009) recognized several benefits including personal development, a better self-knowledge and understanding, flexibility, cultural knowledge, international knowledge, motivation, and career development. Kitsantas (2004) noted studying abroad enhanced cross-cultural skills, helped the participants become more proficient in subject matter, and improved their socializing skills.

Another recognized benefit includes increased employment opportunities. When students enter their careers with a global view, global perspectives and knowledge of other cultures, students have an advantage over ones who do not have this experience

and knowledge (McGowan, 2007). Briers et al. (2010) show studying abroad improves competitiveness in the global market. Due to the increase of U.S. jobs that involve international trade, Bruening and Shao (2005) emphasized the need for an increase in international study. Large companies that work with other countries value and look to hire culturally diverse employees with language skills (Acker & Scanes, 1998). Almost all jobs in the future will require or benefit from employees that have a global understanding and awareness (Bikson, 1996).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

The theoretical framework guiding this study was informed by two theories, the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Two Factor Theory. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) states a person's attitude toward a behavior, the subjective norm, and the perceived control of a behavior can lead to intentions which can then predict human behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (2006) states as a rule for the theory, "the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger should be the person's intention to perform the behavior" (p. 1). In relation to this study, student behaviors about studying abroad, their subjective norms, and perceived control over the international experience can predict their intentions of studying abroad.

#### **Herzberg's Motivational Theory**

In Frederick Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, Herzberg noted two separate groups of factors that have a strong impact on motivation. These factors are usually related to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Herzberg refers to hygiene factors as preventative methods to reduce the risk for dissatisfaction. Opposite of these hygiene factors are the motivational factors, which

can result in satisfaction and productivity. These motivational factors include things such as recognition, achievement, and growth (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Study abroad programs are new and interesting opportunities for students, which may motivate students and create internal satisfaction, ultimately increasing their productivity in their academic careers and future employment.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the participants' motivations. The findings from this research will provide valuable insight to utilize in the continued and future planning of short-term study abroad programs. The specific research objective was to explore student participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program.

### **Methods/Procedures**

#### **Population and Sample**

North Carolina State University College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness 2014 Short-Term Study Abroad Program in the United Kingdom was the focus of this study. This short-term study abroad program was started in 2011, with the desire to give students the opportunity to compare agribusiness techniques in the United States with the methods used in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, and with the desire to create more international opportunities for the faculty and students at North Carolina State University. Since the creation of the program, 113 undergraduate students have participated in the international experience.

The population for this study consisted of all of the student participants of the 2014 College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program to the United Kingdom ( $N = 24$ ). A census study was conducted with a final  $N = 23$  as the accessible population. All

of the program participants were enrolled in the undergraduate North Carolina State University course ARE 494 or AGI 194 and received three credit hours.

### **Data Collection**

This descriptive qualitative study utilized observational case study research. Case study is considered a bounded system and is viewed as an object instead of a process (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). A benefit of case study research is that it allows researchers to preserve the significant and holistic characteristics of real-life experiences (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2013). Due to the importance of the context related to this research study, combined with the unique nature of the study abroad program and participants, a case study method was selected.

During the first class meeting of the ARE 494/AGI 194 course during the spring 2014 semester, the students consented to participate in the study. On the same day, the participants completed the first written questionnaire in class, which was distributed by the researcher. Throughout the semester before their time abroad, students answered other short writing prompts during class. Two weeks prior to the students' international experience, focus groups were held. Focus groups allow for interactions in groups, generating rich data and information about a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Morgan, 1997; Patton, 1990). Focus groups promote an environment allowing for discussion "designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive and non-threatening environment" (Krueger, 1988, p. 18).

The focus groups took place on-campus during the ARE 494/AGI 194 class time. The class was randomly divided into two groups, with one focus group having eleven participants and another having twelve, which followed Krueger's (1994)

suggestion of having focus groups range from four to twelve participants per group in order to allow for participant discussion and proper management. A second round of focus groups was held the week after the students returned from their travel. The researcher recorded the focus groups using voice recorders. The researcher and course professor also took notes to record the participants' statements. The voice recordings were saved onto the researcher's computer and were transcribed verbatim.

As a requirement of the ARE 494/AGI 194 course, the students maintained a journal about their experiences while abroad and their reflections upon return. Studies have proven journaling strengthens, deepens, and enhances student learning (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Zhao, 2003; Gouldthorpe et al., 2012). The researcher also had access to the student participants' applications to the study abroad program. The researcher highlighted key points relating to the study objectives in the journals and applications and recorded them in an Excel file. The responses from the journals and applications were stored anonymously.

### **Instrumentation**

The first instrument used for this study was a questionnaire administered at the beginning of the semester to the ARE 494/AGI 194 students during designated class time. This questionnaire was created by the researcher and designed specifically for this study and its participants. It contained twelve open-ended questions regarding the student participants' demographic information, professional goals, travel experiences, agricultural background, interest in studying abroad, and expectations of the study abroad program.

Throughout the following weeks of the semester, several reflective activities were facilitated to inquire about interest in studying abroad, interests in this specific

program, and motivations for studying abroad. Two weeks prior to the students' international experience, focus groups were held on-campus during the ARE 494/AGI 194 class time. The class was split into two groups; one focus group was led by the researcher and one by the class professor. The planned focus group questions were open-ended and related to their interests in studying abroad and their expectations. After returning from their time abroad, another round of in-class focus groups were held where students reflected on their experiences abroad.

### **Data Analysis**

The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed by a coding process. Based on the recommendations of Merriam (2009) the coding was broken down to categorize segments of data into broader themes. These themes assisted in making meaning and answering the research questions pertinent to the study. The researcher searched for common themes related to the participants' motivations for studying abroad. Subthemes were identified within the common themes in order to describe the findings in more detail.

### **Trustworthiness Criteria**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert qualitative research can be evaluated through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Confirmability was addressed in this study by including excerpts of the raw data which illustrate the findings and conclusions. Confirmability and dependability were also met by the audit trail of the researcher, which included audio recordings, field notes, and questionnaire results, which were appropriate for improving the trustworthiness of the data (Dooley, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation is a common method in qualitative research, which is the use of

multiple methods of data collection to ensure the meaning of the data is clear and valid (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To increase the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was used by having a variety of data collection methods: written questionnaires, oral questionnaires, focus groups, applications, and journal entries. Yin (2003) and Creswell (1998) view having multiple sources of evidence as the most crucial point for case study methodology because any finding in a case study that is based upon more than one source has higher credibility.

### **Results**

#### **Characteristics of the Population**

The population of the 2014 North Carolina State University College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program was made up of 48% ( $n = 11$ ) male student participants and 52% ( $n = 12$ ) female student participants. Student participants ranged from ages 18 to 39 with a mean age of 21. All participants were enrolled in North Carolina State University as an undergraduate four-year student or as a North Carolina State University two-year student. Four of the student participants were enrolled in the Agricultural Institute seeking an Associate of Applied Science degree, three in the first year of their degree and one in their second year. The remaining students were enrolled as undergraduate students earning a Bachelor of Science degree and included four freshmen, five sophomores, eight juniors, and two seniors from the undergraduate program. A variety of majors were represented. The most common major was Agribusiness Management ( $n = 9$ ). There were four Animal Science majors, three Poultry Science majors, two Livestock and Poultry Management majors, and one student in each of the following majors: Plant and Soil

Science, Genetics, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Science, and Food Science.

### **Findings**

The objective of this study was to explore student participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program. The common themes that emerged included the short-term length aspect, completion of course credits, promotion through personal interactions, and experiences.

#### **Theme One: A Short-Term Length Aspect**

The first major theme to emerge from the participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program was the short-term length aspect of the program. Several subthemes emerged specific to the motivation from the short-term length. One of the subthemes mentioned described how the discovery of a ten day short-term program generated interest in studying abroad.

I can honestly say that freshman year I made my mind up not to study abroad because I thought all of the programs were for a whole semester and I didn't like being gone that long. But, when I learned it was only ten days I got a little more accustomed to the idea and I thought that it would be fun to see another place in the world.

Another subtheme identified this particular study abroad experience as a foundation leading to future, long-term trips abroad. One participant stated, "Short-term programs have more structure. I am thinking about doing a long term study abroad program later but first I wanted to do this because there is a lot more structure in short-term programs."

The third subtheme noted was a lack of desire to stay away from home for a long period of time. Several students echoed the

sentiment, "I do not [like] being away from home for long periods of time." Another student mentioned their time commitment associated with their duties at home, "Because of obligations I have back on the family farm I would be unable to go on a [study abroad trip for the] entire semester. This short trip works perfectly with my schedule."

The fourth subtheme observed was the perception of a diminished risk associated with short-term study abroad programs. The short duration of the experience contributed to these perceptions, which was evident in the following participant's statement, "I feel like there is less risk involved. I am kind of scared to leave somewhere for an entire semester and go somewhere new." Another supporting statement was, "Going somewhere for ten days isn't intimidating. If you get over there and didn't like it, it's only ten days till you're back at home."

#### **Theme Two: Completion of Course Credits**

The second theme that emerged when examining student participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program was the completion of course credits. An emerging subtheme was how the short-term study abroad program fit into their degree plan. Two students had similar responses of, "It's the only [study abroad program] available to me" and "It was the only [study abroad program] that my degree program would allow me to do."

Another subtheme emerged related to the timing of the program. Students noted they favored the program being offered over spring break through statements such as, "I like the fact that they are over spring break and you don't miss any classes that way" and "I chose this program in general because I like the fact that it is only in spring break. Normally I don't do anything in spring break but work so it is something fun to do."



### **Theme Three: Promotion through Personal Interactions**

The third emerging theme was the importance of personal interactions in encouraging students to participate in the short-term study abroad program. Two types of interactions were deemed as important: student-to-student and student-to-faculty. The first subtheme under promotion through personal interactions was specific to the interactions between students. Many participants stated they chose to study abroad in this program because of comments from past participants. One student stated, "I had heard a lot of people that had went through the program in the past say it was the best experience and that they would go back right now if they could." Another student expanded "I'd heard about the trip from people that went in the past and they said it was great. I always wanted to go to Europe anyways so I figured this would be my best and only opportunity to go."

Some students noted the importance of faculty which motivated them to participate in the program, which is contributed to the development of the second subtheme. One student noted, "I was talking with my professor and he said I should go for it." Another student expanded,

I chose to study abroad because of Dr. Campbell. I had first met Dr. Campbell in his Agricultural Law class that he offered this fall. He has impressed upon all of us how very great an opportunity this trip is for us and how easily obtainable the costs are. I had never planned to study abroad for fear of the costs but he broke down the different ways that you may be funded and I was more at ease with the idea of paying for the trip. I have always wanted to see other areas of the world and now I am really excited that I am able to

with my North Carolina agricultural peers.

### **Theme Four: An Experiences Aspect**

The fourth theme that emerged when examining the student participants' motivations to participate in a short-term study abroad program identified opportunities to engage in different experiences. One subtheme noted was travel and cultures. One student elaborated on travel through the statement, "Short-term study abroad allows a taste of a different country. It inspires but does not overwhelm the traveler." An additional comment was,

I have chosen to study abroad because I come from a very small and rural community. I have grown up seeing people who have never even really been out of the state and I decided a while ago that I am not that type of person. I want to see the world even if it is just this one trip.

Another subtheme that emerged was that of content based experiences, such as agricultural or agribusiness experiences. One student offered the following response when asked about their motivations to participate in the short-term program:

When I first came to N.C. State and heard about traveling abroad, I never saw myself as going that far away from my hometown in Johnston County. That all changed when I found out about the amazing opportunities to visit and explore another place's agriculture. I also hope that I get a chance to learn something that I could bring back to my own farming operation that would be beneficial to our resources.

### **Conclusions**

Students were attracted to this short-term study abroad program because of the length of the program. Students found the short duration of ten days appealing. This

study abroad program was also seen as attractive since it was over spring break and students did not have to miss class. These findings supported prior research reported by Zhai and Scheer (2002) and Bruening and Frick (2004a). Students that do not wish to stay away from home for an extended period of time considered short-term study abroad programs to be an ideal opportunity. Short-term study abroad programs are an attractive option for students who have too many obligations at home to leave home for a long period of time. Students were also motivated to participate in this short-term study abroad program because they viewed it as a chance to see if they might possibly enjoy a long-term stay abroad. Students viewed short-term study abroad programs having less risk than long-term study abroad programs because there was less time invested abroad and away from home.

Some students were encouraged to participate in this study abroad program through interactions with others. Several positive interactions, like the conversations held with peers who had previously participated in the program, served as a motivator for current students. This is similar to previous findings by Zhai and Scheer (2002). Past participants enjoyed their study abroad experience and shared that enjoyment with potential program participants, which is related to Herzberg's (1959) Two Factor Theory when discussing how personal growth leads to motivation and satisfaction. As stated in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, the more positive discussion of the program leads to a stronger desire to participate in the program (Ajzen, 2006). Professors also motivated students to participate in this short term study abroad program. This encouragement from the professors could be viewed as expectations from others, which would be considered a normative belief (Ajzen, 2006).

When agriculture majors at North Carolina State University are contemplating a study abroad program, there are not many options that help fulfill their degree requirements. Brooks, Frick, and Bruening (2006) discovered similar findings with other agriculture majors at a different institution. One reason participants were motivated in this particular study abroad program was the chance to complete course credits which are under the required category of General Education Global Knowledge courses. This program was the only study abroad option to help meet the curricular hour needs of students. Having a short-term program containing three hours of course credit was appealing to students, which is supported by Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1959).

#### **Recommendations/Implications Recommendations for Future Practice**

With the noted importance of personal interaction, past program participants should be recruited to talk to potential student participants about the study abroad program as a way to influence and motivate more students to participate in the program. A study abroad peer presenters program should be formed in colleges of agriculture. All of the peer presenters could be utilized to promote study abroad opportunities through informational presentations to classes and students specifically in the college. This ambassador-type program will also provide the peer presenters with leadership and public speaking skills. Professors should also take the time to identify and encourage students who would be good candidates for a study abroad experience.

Universities need to encourage and provide opportunities in regards to course release or funding to encourage faculty to participate in global opportunities. Having faculty who support and encourage study abroad opportunities is important. Faculty in

colleges of agriculture should become more involved in the study abroad opportunities, either through their own participation or encouraging students and/or advisees to seek out global programs.

More short-term study abroad programs with an emphasis on agriculture should be developed and offered. This Agribusiness Short-Term Study Abroad Program could serve as a model for these future study abroad programs. Since students placed importance on having a study abroad program relating to their majors and fields of study, the development of additional short-term study abroad programs should occur in colleges of agriculture.

As new programs are developed, faculty should be made aware of the various study abroad opportunities so promotion for degree-related short-term study abroad programs could occur through the departments within colleges of agriculture. Undergraduate coordinators play an important and active role in informing the faculty of their departments about the available agriculturally related study abroad opportunities and how they fit into students' degree plans. Undergraduate coordinators should also understand how to substitute courses from institutions abroad for required classes at their university.

Since participants noted the importance of fulfilling course credits, new degree-related short-term study abroad programs could be created to fit curricula within colleges of agriculture. Faculty advisors throughout colleges of agriculture should be given displays or brochures with detailed information about how their advisees can study abroad while fulfilling their degree-related required courses at the same time. Underclassmen, especially freshmen, should be informed early in their academic career about the short-term study abroad options available so they can plan in

advance for future study abroad programs. Additionally, participants noted possible interest in participating in a longer-term study abroad program in the future. Some younger students may have a similar interest. By becoming aware of the different options for long-term and short-term study abroad programs, students could possibly have the chance to participate in both over the course of a college career. Participants also noted the ideal timing for this study abroad trip. As a result, short-term programs during spring break should be continued to be held because they reach students who cannot be away from home for an extended amount of time.

### **Recommendations for Research**

A multitude of opportunities exist for future research. Pre-trip and post-trip focus groups should be held for the future short-term study abroad programs as a way to understand the participants' motivations and experiences. A five and ten year follow up study could be conducted with these same participants from this study to see how this short-term study abroad program influenced their remaining school experiences and career interests/goals. A similar study should be carried out with the future participants of this same program each year to see if the same motivations and expectations arise.

Additional research should be conducted to examine how location of an agriculturally related short-term study abroad program encourages or discourages student participation. Additional research could also involve comparable agricultural short-term study abroad programs at North Carolina State University to see if participants share similar motivations and expectations. A similar study could also be conducted with short-term programs offered through colleges of agriculture at other universities.

Students' motivations could also be examined during the completion of study

abroad programs with different lengths and/or objectives. For example, research could be conducted with students who elect to participate in a long-term study abroad program or a program with a service-based focus. Finally, future research with business and industry would be important to assist in the development of competencies that are important to be gained during study abroad.

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