

EMBEDDED EDUCATION ABROAD & UNACKNOWLEDGED POPULATIONS

[A FOUR YEAR ENROLLMENT ANALYSIS]

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ABSTRACT:

This study sought to scrutinize widely-held assumptions of the traditional education abroad student profile by more accurately accounting for previously underrepresented or unacknowledged populations. In particular, the study focused on the extent to which financial need, first generation status, and heritage impact education abroad choice and in what ways these and others populations participate in education abroad programming. To do so, a comprehensive, four-year enrollment analysis of all degree-seeking Penn State students who studied abroad in academic years 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 was conducted (n=8,415). The findings show that education abroad program type does in fact appeal differently to particular student populations. Males, minorities, first-generation and non-traditional students and those with greater financial need are disproportionately represented in embedded programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Does contemporary education abroad remain mostly an opportunity for white, middle-class, female students majoring in the social sciences?
- What enrollment trends in the education abroad population have manifested between the 2005/06 and the 2008/09 academic years?
- How does the student profile vary by education abroad program type?
- To what extent does education abroad impact academic performance, as indicated by cumulative grade point average (GPA)?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- *Education abroad is an undergraduate experience for a select population of students.* The enrollment is disproportionately white, female, and nearly 50% have no demonstrated financial need or FAFSA on record. Most are between the ages of 20 and 22 and are academically successful students majoring in a business related field. Many students are seniors, PA-residents and are from highly educated families. Heritage plays a role in students' decisions about where to study.
- *There have been only modest proportional enrollment changes since 2005/06.* What changes there have been may be due to the increased access to embedded programs (i.e., increasing proportion of non-traditional students). Proportional representation of students choosing full-year, semester and summer programming has remained stable. The majority of all students choose destinations in Europe and there has been no movement in favor of non-traditional locations. The number of students with full financial need has proportionately decreased.
- *Program type appeals differently to particular populations of students.* Embedded programs represent greater student diversity, a wider array of academic disciplines, more diverse geographical destinations, and are host to students from throughout the whole of the university's many campuses. First generation students are disproportionately enrolled in embedded programs. Students with greater financial need are more likely to participate on embedded education abroad programs or academic-year programs.
- *There is no overall GPA benefit associated with education abroad.* The findings reveal the presence of significant GPA changes before, during, and after studying abroad, suggesting a "V" pattern in cumulative GPA change over time, with the grades earned abroad reflecting a slight decline. However, the changes are extremely small and without much applied meaning. The findings challenge the value of using the GPA as a reliable indicator of academic performance within education abroad research.

IMPLICATIONS AT-A-GLANCE:

- *Program diversity equals greater population diversity.* Embedded programs disproportionately attract students from populations less likely to study abroad for a summer, semester or academic year, including minorities, first generation students, non-traditional students, males, and students from particular disciplines. A portfolio of offerings that includes embedded programs can boost diverse student participation and strengthen efforts toward internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum.
- *A myth? Financial need impacts program choice.* There is some truth to claims that students are selecting embedded programs because they have limited financial resources that prevent longer stays abroad. Embedded program participants have significantly higher financial need than students participating on semester and summer programs, but the differences are small. While financial need may be an obstacle, need alone does not appear to be the driving factor behind decisions on how long to study abroad.
- *Good students at home are just as likely to be good students while abroad.* Programs of all variations enroll academically successful students (overall mean GPA is 3.38). These students have developed the academic skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to enable them to excel at their home institutions. It is these strengths that support them in their academic pursuits while abroad.
- *Institutional culture matters.* Penn State's network of 24 campuses provides diversity in the student profile, while offering one consistent, centralized education abroad structure. At the smaller campuses, over 92% of those who study abroad enroll in embedded programs compared with 72% of those on the comprehensive campuses. At University Park, just 23% choose embedded programs.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics: By Program Type, 2005-2009*

	Program Type			
	Semester (%)	Summer (%)	Embedded (%)	AY (%)
Gender (n=8415)				
Female	2202 (44.7)	1191 (24.2)	1476 (30.0)	59 (1.2)
Male	1378 (39.5)	719 (20.6)	1338 (38.4)	52 (1.5)
Race/Ethnicity (n=8415)				
White American	2880 (44.0)	1492 (22.8)	2097 (32.0)	76 (1.2)
Asian American	191 (41.0)	114 (24.5)	149 (32.0)	12 (2.6)
Hispanic American	137 (35.5)	70 (18.7)	110 (45.2)	4 (0.6)
Black American	90 (30.2)	54 (18.1)	148 (49.7)	6 (2.0)
Foreign	10 (10.6)	25 (26.6)	59 (62.8)	0 (0.0)
Native American	7 (63.6)	1 (9.1)	3 (27.3)	0 (0.0)
Unreported	265 (39.0)	154 (22.6)	248 (36.5)	13 (1.9)
First Gen. Status (n=8415)				
Not First Generation	3005 (44.9)	1552 (23.2)	2051 (30.6)	86 (1.3)
First Generation	575 (33.4)	358 (20.8)	763 (44.3)	25 (1.5)
Non-Trad. Student (n=8414)				
Age ≤ 25	3547 (45.5)	1848 (23.7)	2297 (29.4)	109 (1.4)
Age 26+	33 (5.4)	62 (10.1)	516 (84.2)	2 (0.3)
Need Index (n=8411)				
No FAFSA	1108 (30.9)	599 (31.4)	623 (22.1)	21 (19.6)
0	845 (23.6)	405 (21.2)	445 (15.8)	17 (15.9)
1-49	627 (17.5)	358 (18.7)	505 (17.9)	18 (16.8)
50-99	838 (23.4)	463 (24.2)	897 (31.9)	38 (35.5)
100	162 (4.5)	85 (4.5)	344 (12.2)	13 (12.1)

For more information about this study or to request a copy of the paper, please contact Anthony C. Ogden at, aco3@psu.edu