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In Pursuit of Intercultural Competency During Study Abroad

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IN PURSUIT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY DURING STUDY ABROAD

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PIM 75

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions often promote their study abroad programs as a way for their students to achieve intercultural competency, which is seen as an important skill to have as the world becomes more globalized. The belief is that study abroad programs will lead to a greater chance of students gaining intercultural competency by having a large amount of in-person interactions with others from different backgrounds. Authors such as Deardorff (2008) and Benet (2009) note that if a student has a high level of intercultural competency, they not only have the desire to interact with those of other cultural backgrounds, but they are also able to communicate effectively, shift their frame of reference and behave appropriately in intercultural situations. However, once the student goes abroad, the sending institution often does not know if the student is actually achieving this competency. This qualitative study sought to answer the question of how undergraduate students might develop intercultural competency while studying abroad, and what steps can be taken to increase students' intercultural competency. This work also contributes to the field by including a number of students' voices, an element that is often lacking in similar studies. Findings from interviews with 11 students and two staff members at a small, public college show that a number of factors such as cultural mentors, interaction with international and local students, and the type of courses students take abroad can lead to greater intercultural competency gain. The student's development and motivation while abroad also impacted the level of intercultural competency the student achieved.

Cross-cultural understanding has been a long-time goal of study abroad programs. Hoffa (2007) discusses how higher education study abroad programs, which are programs where students receive academic credit as part of their degree program from an institution abroad, strived to become more culturally immersive after the postwar years with “each based on the proposition that peace-building begins with intercultural learning that comes about only when students leave home and live and learn as natives” (p. 140). Study abroad programs continue to promote this goal of students achieving intercultural competency, especially as the world has become more globalized. Intercultural competency includes having the knowledge, motivation and skills to communicate with those of other cultural backgrounds. The hope is that when students have in-person interactions with others from different backgrounds, they will have a greater chance of achieving this competency. Clarke, Flaherty, Wright and McMillen (2009) state that “extending the classroom beyond the conventional campus setting to include an actual international encounter with other people and cultures has long been recognized as a valuable educational practice” (p. 173). Higher education institutions strive to send their students abroad so that they will become global citizens who can use this intercultural competency that they gain abroad inside and outside the work place later in life. However, are students who go abroad actually achieving intercultural competency?

My interest in this topic stems from personal experience and reflection. When I was an undergraduate student, I studied abroad for a semester in London through a third-party provider. I was looking forward to the cultural journey I was about to embark on, which would include interning at a film production company. I am a white, female and I was excited for the cultural diversity I would be exposed to. While I did have a great experience, I felt I was missing something when I returned home. I felt that I did not get that full cultural experience I was

looking forward to. I found out when I arrived in London that all of the interns on the study abroad program would be living together. This meant that I was living with primarily white women from the Midwest. For my internship, I worked with a small company of four people. While I learned a great deal about the film industry, I had a hard time making sense of the new British office culture I was a part of. I took a required British culture class with the fellow interns who also participated on my program, and while we talked about British history at great length, there was not much time dedicated to having students discuss their experiences with the culture, their work and how they felt about their experiences. While I understand that there is no language barrier and going to London does not entail the same amount of culture shock as going to India or China, I often wonder what more I could have done and what more the program could have done to encourage more intercultural learning and understanding.

Now that I work as a Study Away Assistant at a small, public college, I often wonder if our students that we send abroad are gaining the intercultural competency that my staff and I strongly hope they achieve. Are our students gaining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them to interact with other cultures appropriately, or are they spending most of their time abroad with their American group of friends and not being given the opportunities to reflect on the values of their host country culture and their home culture? If they are effectively gaining intercultural competency, what factors contribute to that gain? If they are not, how much of that blame really falls on the student? Is it the student's attitude that is preventing them from gaining these intercultural skills or is the program not fully encouraging it? Not every student will gain intercultural competency while studying abroad, and it is important to understand why this is and what international educators can do about it. This leads me to my research question for this

present study: *How might undergraduate students develop intercultural competency while studying abroad, and what steps can be taken to increase students' intercultural competency?*

In this Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone (IPIC) paper, I will first outline the conceptual framework that guides my work, and then present the research that others have done on intercultural competency gain in relation to study abroad and student development theory. After identifying the gaps in the research, I will outline the qualitative research method that I followed to attempt to fill those gaps. I will then present and analyze the data I collected from interviewing current and past study abroad students and study abroad staff members to demonstrate how intercultural competency is achieved and not achieved on study abroad programs. Following the analysis, I will make recommendations for future research on intercultural competency gain in study abroad programs.

Conceptual Framework

Key theories that undergird this study are Baxter Magolda's (2009) theory of self-authorship and Baxter Magolda and King's (2005) model of intercultural maturity. Baxter Magolda's (2009) theory of self-authorship revolves around the idea that college students are in the developmental stage where they are learning how to make meaning of their experiences and forming their own opinions. This self-authorship is extremely important when students are interacting with another culture and trying to make sense of their experiences studying abroad. In addition to the theory of self-authorship, I also assessed Baxter Magolda and King's (2005) model of intercultural maturity in relation to intercultural competency development abroad. Accordingly, I looked at the three trajectories- cognitive (understanding of cultural differences), intrapersonal (the ability to accept cultural differences), and interpersonal (the ability to function with those of diverse backgrounds) - to see how students' knowledge, awareness of their values,

and ability to interact with other cultures shifted, if it did at all, as a result of their time studying abroad.

In addition to student development theory, Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) also guides this study. Bennett's model provides a framework for demonstrating students' abilities to move from an ethnocentric stage (assuming that your culture is superior to other cultures and you cannot accept cultural differences) to an ethnorelative stage (the ability to understand that your culture is not any more central to reality than any other culture and you try to understand cultural differences). This model ties back to Baxter Magolda's (2009) theory of student development and self-authorship because it also recognizes that each person makes meaning a different way and they interpret the world as they interact with it. The DMIS is also important because it shows not only how a person understands another culture, but how they understand their own culture as well. As the analysis below will demonstrate, the DMIS allowed me to see whether the students were in an ethnocentric or ethnorelative stage. Each stage has certain goals and outcomes, so it was a useful framework in measuring intercultural competency achievement. In the next literature review section, I will analyze Baxter Magolda, King and Bennett's theories in greater detail in the literature review presented in the next section.

Literature Review

Several insights guided the literature review process, beginning with a foundational book by Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou's (2012) titled *Student Learning Abroad: What our Students are Learning, What They're Not, and What We Can Do About It*. Vande Berge, Paige and Lou's book provided pertinent information about intercultural competency gained on study abroad programs, and moreover, was an essential starting point for identifying other authors and

resources I could further investigate for my research. I also used the SIT library search to look for academic articles that pertained to my topic. I primarily sought literature that focused on what intercultural competency looks like, how intercultural competency can be achieved or not achieved on study abroad programs, and how a student's development can affect intercultural competency gain. In the following sections, I will first define intercultural competency and discuss the components that make up intercultural competency. I will then discuss how intercultural competency can be achieved on study abroad programs. Finally, I will address how student development affects intercultural competency gain.

Defining Intercultural Competency

A number of researchers have discussed the many components that make up intercultural competency. Deardorff (2008) defines intercultural competency as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.33). She also states that it involves the ability for someone to shift their frame of reference and to behave appropriately in intercultural situations. Bennett (2009) states that intercultural competency is made up of cognitive (knowledge about cultural issues), affective (motivation to engage in intercultural situations), and behavioral skills (skills and abilities to act appropriately in intercultural situations). This means that intercultural competency includes what Bennett refers to as the mindset, skillset, and heartset. Williams (2009) also discusses related factors by stating that the cognitive trajectory focuses on “having the appropriate knowledge about cultural norms, values, behaviors, and issues” (p. 290). The affective trajectory “relates to the flexibility to adapt to new situations and open-mindedness to encounter new values” (Williams, 2009, p. 290). The critical trajectory includes “resourcefulness, problem-solving skills, and cultural appropriate people skills” (Williams, 2009, p.290). Clarke,

Flaherty, Wright, and McMillen (2009) also discuss these factors by defining intercultural competency as characterized by the following: “global awareness, adeptness at intercultural communication, openness to diverse people, and intercultural sensitivity” (p. 174).

A number of studies (Anderson & Lawton, 2011; Williams, 2009; Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Stebleton, Soria, & Cherney, 2013) show study abroad experiences lead to a greater development in intercultural competency gain. Anderson and Lawson (2011) report that “participation in study abroad was positively associated with the ability of students to understand the complexities of global issues, to apply disciplinary knowledge in a global context, to develop linguistic and cultural competency and to work with people of other cultures” (p. 40). However, for those gains to occur, each of these also authors also point to the importance of having the study abroad programs be meaningfully developed with the students reflecting on and analyzing their experiences. The next section discusses in detail this need for reflective and meaningful study abroad experiences.

Achieving Intercultural Competency on Study Abroad Programs-Guided Reflection

A common theme within the literature reviewed is that while study abroad programs are a great way to encourage cross-cultural understanding, just sending a student to another country does not automatically mean their intercultural learning will dramatically increase. As Anderson and Latwon (2011) state, “a student could participate in a study abroad program without experiencing the culture in which he or she resided” (p. 87). If a student does not make an attempt to engage with the culture, no intercultural learning will take place. Bennett (2010) has also found that when working with college-aged students who study abroad that:

The cross-cultural contact does not automatically translate into intercultural

learning. In other words, the mere experience of being in another culture does not necessarily translate into either specific knowledge about that culture or transferable principles about intercultural relations (p.419).

Students need to be able to reflect on their experience and make meaning out of what they are witnessing in their host country. They need to understand how to negotiate cultural differences and how their own culture affects how they view their host culture. Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou (2012) state, “Humans do not learn as the environment imprints itself on them, but through individually constructing, and, through their membership in various cultural communities, coconstructing the world through the very act of perceiving it” (p. xv). A student will only learn from their host culture if they can process and reflect on their experience rather than being passive in their new environment. Despite its importance, intercultural learning is not something that can happen quickly abroad either. Vande Berg (2009) says, “Intercultural learning is developmental, not transformational” (p. 18). Intercultural learning is a process that students learn and develop over time. This learning process will hopefully continue even when the students come back from studying abroad by taking the intercultural skills and knowledge that they acquired overseas and using them on their home campus. However, it is becoming a greater challenge for the home and host country staff and faculty, as well as the students, to make sure that this intercultural learning even happens abroad if the resources are not in place to help facilitate this learning.

With many students spending more time with other American students and relying more on technology to keep in touch with those back home (Ogden, 2007), it has become a greater challenge for study abroad faculty and staff to figure out strategies for pushing students outside of their comfort zones to an appropriate degree in order for them to fully take advantage of their

intercultural learning. Engle and Engle (2004) state, “For most overseas participants, the prospect of a genuinely challenging, creatively unsettling cultural and linguistic experience abroad has receded yearly” (p. 221). It is up to stakeholders involved in the study abroad process, from host country faculty and staff to third party providers, to understand how to intervene in ways that will challenge students enough to engage in their host country’s culture and gain those intercultural skills. If students are pushed outside of their comfort zones, then they must have appropriate resources to help them make meaning of their experiences, good and bad.

One of the most important resources for students who are abroad are faculty members who can help them reflect and make meaning of their experience abroad. Reflection is a key word present in much of the literature, often tied to the idea that it is difficult for a student to have an impactful, intercultural experience abroad without it. Watson, Siska and Wolfel (2013) state that:

Structured reflection and analysis activities that are carried out through the period spent abroad can provide crucial feedback that will allow administrators to help students reflect on both successful and less successful language encounters, overcome cultural misunderstandings, or draw important regional connections (p.73).

It is often difficult for a student to make sense of these experiences on their own since they are not at a developmental stage in life where they have the skills to do so. For this reason, guidance is necessary. Marx and Moss (2011) point to the importance of faculty assistance by stating that:

Immersion experiences alone are not sufficient to move students’ intercultural development forward; cultural reflection is essential to the process. It cannot be assumed, however, that students will be able to engage in such reflection on their own. Study

abroad students need a cultural translator and intercultural guide to provide support for their intercultural growth (p. 44).

These cultural translators, or cultural mentors, are often in the form of trained, on-site staff members who conduct a class specifically to help students guide them through the process of cultural understanding (Vande Berg, 2009). Marx and Moss (2011) say that this classroom environment “must attend to students’ affective, social, and cognitive needs and create a safe space where students can share what are often difficult and confusing thoughts and feeling and take risks as they seek to understand cultural contexts” (p. 44). Vande Berg (2009) uses the example of a cultural mentor explaining the differences that students may see in teaching styles and classroom expectations in their host country. He says:

A cultural mentor on site would be able to guide them [students] toward an understanding that ‘getting the point across’ in ways that may be acceptable in classes in the U.S. may not be cultural appropriate at the program site – that language performance is a fundamental part of culture, and that foreigners are often judged by more demanding sociolinguistic standards than those that have governed student language learning at home (p. 9).

Students are often not in the position to learn this type of cultural information on their own. They need someone to help them understand and reflect on different cultural values, which will then lead to intercultural competency building. According to Vande Berg, Paige and Lou (2012):

Only when students are learning within a context informed by experiential/constructivist perspectives- only when they are immersed in another culture and receive meaningful intercultural mentoring and opportunities for reflection on meaning making – do most students develop to an impressive degree (p. 21).

Clearly, much of the literature argues that if international educators want to see students make greater strides in intercultural competency gain, cultural mentors are most likely the key to help achieve that success.

An example of this successful mentoring is what Vande Berg and Paige (2012) title the Georgetown Consortium Project. This project involved examining the experiences and intercultural learning outcomes of students on 61 different study abroad programs over a 4-year period from 2003-2007. The goal of this project was to see what factors influenced greater intercultural growth. One of the elements they focused on was cultural mentoring and guided reflection by testing the students with Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a questionnaire that assesses intercultural competence. They found that the group of students who received the most individual mentoring made greater intercultural development advancement than any other group. This led Vande Berge and Paige to determine that students increase their intercultural competency “when educators take steps not only to immerse students, but to actively facilitate their learning, helping them reflect on how they are making meaning from the experience that their ‘immersion’ is providing” (p.38).

A study done by Marx and Moss (2011) on a study abroad program in London brought about similar findings. This study focused on a student named Ana who participated in a teacher education study abroad program. Ana struggled in the beginning with the cultural differences she experienced during her teaching internship at an elementary school. However, the support and reflection she received helped her overcome challenges and develop greater intercultural skills. Ana was enrolled in a course at the university taught by a woman named Catherine who helped students unpack their cultural experiences. Marx and Moss (2011) state:

This exploration of cultural perspective and cultural translation that Catherine provided

played a vital role in Ana's intercultural development . . . Catherine continually modeled for Ana a way to try and understand the 'British perspective' by exploring how her own culture- 'being American'- was influencing the way she was interpreting her experiences at North School (p. 42).

Cultural mentors are a key factor to intercultural competency gain and Pedersen (2010) points out that this strategic intervening in student learning is what all study abroad programs need. However, Peckenpaugh (2014) states that "the cultural mentor can be crucial, yet given the sheer number of abroad programs hosted by any number of academic, private, or non-profit entities, it might not be feasible for all students to participate in such programs" (p. 117). Cultural mentors may not be feasible for every program, so programs must implement other strategies that foster students interacting with the host culture at a high level. Williams (2005) states that for students who were "taking foreign language or cultural courses, attending ethnic celebrations, or new religious services; or in other ways learned about or interacted with people of another culture, their intercultural communication skills seemed to proportionally reflect that exposure" (p. 369). If providing a cultural mentor on a program is not possible, then there should be other strategic methods, such as courses that focus on cultural understanding or events that allow for interaction with the locals, in place that still allow for students to expose themselves to their new cultural surrounding.

While reflection and mentoring are key for students who are currently studying abroad, students should also take the time when they return home to assess how they feel they have developed in terms of intercultural competency gain. Williams (2009) points to the importance of student evaluations administered by the student's home campus study abroad office that contain

questions that allow students to reflect on how they interacted with the host culture. For example, one of the questions is:

What aspects of the country or culture where you studied abroad do you understand better? For example, did your experience increase your understanding of the country's people, values, culture, economy, politics, society and/ or environment? If yes, how? If no, why not? (p.292)

The student's study abroad office should give them the opportunity to reflect on their cultural experiences when they return home because they often have a hard time expressing how they feel they've changed in regards to this intercultural competency development. Anderson and Lawton (2011) state that "it is not uncommon for students returning from an overseas experience to report that it was profound, even life-changing event. However, it seems to be difficult for students to articulate the way in which they have changed" (p.88). If the student cannot say how they changed and what they've learned, it may be assumed that the student might not have changed at all. Williams (2009) says "Encouraging students to reflect on their experiences abroad and to articulate their own outcomes, shows that students gain intercultural competencies and the ability to articulate it, through specific instances and examples" (p. 304). Institutions should provide opportunities that allow students to reflect on and discuss their time abroad when they have returned home.

This push by the authors for cultural mentoring and reflection is strongly tied to research that suggests students are at a developmental stage in life where they need guidance to help make meaning of situations in order to gain intercultural competency. As demonstrated by the examples above, when a student receives mentoring from faculty members, they are much more likely to demonstrate the skills, behavior and knowledge needed to interact with and understand

other cultures. However, each student goes abroad at a different developmental stage, and the mentorship and guided reflection must be appropriately adjusted for each student.

Student Development and Intercultural Competency Gain

Mentoring and reflection are especially crucial for students during study abroad, as they are at the age when they are developing self-authorship and starting to form their own opinions and values. Baxter Magolda (2009) says, “As young adults begin to compose their own realities and recenter into adult contexts, they renegotiate the relationship of their internal voices and external influence” (p. 625). Students in college already face a great shift in their emotional and intellectual development. Ignelzi (2000) expands upon Baxter Magolda’s theory by applying it to the college environment. “The collegiate environment often provides more developmental challenge (and demands) than support for students navigating the transition to self-authorship” (p.14). Add in another culture, and that can cause a great deal of stress and confusion to a student who is still at a peak developmental stage and now has to make sense of a new culture. Without the right combination of mentoring and reflection, the shock of being in another country can cause students to go back to their safe, American bubble. Stuart (2012) states:

Away from their primary culture, students are freed to a large degree from the socializing pressures of home, with little replacement pressure in their new environment. Is it any wonder, then, that many students abroad might choose to minimize unfamiliar challenges to whatever degree possible by (a) clustering with their compatriots, (b) avoiding the language challenge, and (c) exploring the host culture in like-minded groups of other expatriate adolescents? Is there any doubt, considering the developmental state of their brains, about why too many of them ‘behave badly,’ while learning little of the new culture and language? (p.82).

Given the context, we cannot expect most students to be able to fully make meaning out of their experience abroad if educators do not provide them with the proper resources. Baxter Magolda and King (2005) believe that students are at the stage of development where they are developing their own opinions and values, and it is important that they have the ability to shift frames of reference and understand other cultures without holding judgment. This is especially true for a student when developing intercultural maturity abroad. A student will become more interculturally developed if they are able to understand values and opinions from another culture's point of view and understand how that relates to their own culture.

It is also important to note when discussing a student's development, that each student is at a different developmental stage, especially in regards to cultural understanding, and this will influence how much mentoring they will need and also what kind of program they should participate in. Anderson and Lawton (2015) state that "knowing what students seek to gain from their study abroad experience and its influence on program selection should provide guidance on how to design study abroad programs to best facilitate a students' intercultural development" (p.41). It is important to work with each student's needs to know how to appropriately guide their study abroad experience. Anderson and Lawton (2011) also state that:

The personal growth that occurs as a consequence of a study abroad experience is, by definition, a uniquely individual experience. Two students participating in the same study abroad program could each undergo a transformational experience, but see little in common between them regarding that experience. How each student internalized their intercultural experiences is moderated by their prior experiences, both international and domestic (p.96-97).

A student who has traveled to other countries before, or has engaged with other international students on their home campus or participated in international work, may not need as much guidance and mentoring as another student. It is important to assess where the student is currently in regards to cultural understanding and what can be done to shift that level of understanding to the next level.

Baxter Magolda and King (2009) analyze this shift in understanding of other cultures in to three trajectories referred to as cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Each trajectory moves through three phases of development (initial, intermediate, and mature). In the initial level of development for the cognitive trajectory, a student is “naïve about different culture practices and values, resists challenges to one’s own beliefs, and views different cultural perspectives as wrong” (p. 576). A student reaches the mature level of cognitive development when they are able to “consciously shift perspectives and behaviors into an alternative cultural worldview and use multiple cultural frames” (p. 576). Again, that is difficult for a student to do abroad if they do not have any kind of guidance from a cultural mentor or translator and are not given the opportunity for reflection. The intrapersonal trajectory (Baxter Magolda and King, 2005) looks at how a student moves from not understanding other cultures and not understanding their own values to evolving an identity that simultaneously allows them to engage in situations that challenges their views and beliefs. Finally, the interpersonal trajectory (Baxter Magolda and King, 2005) focuses on the shift from a student thinking that different perspectives and values are viewed as wrong to the ability to engage in relationships with diverse people with an appreciation for difference. Students need to be fully engaged in this intercultural development process. Schaetti, Ramsey, and Watanabe (2009) say “To ‘practice’ something is to do it with the deliberate aim of learning and improving one’s competence. It requires a commitment to self-

awareness, self-reflection, and self-monitoring, as well as a commitment to engage the process of developing competence with intention” (p. 129). This commitment to self-awareness and self-reflection is very much present in Baxter Magolda and King’s research as well as in Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).

The DMIS also strongly considers how each person makes meaning in a different way (Bennett, 1993). Baxter Magolda and King state, “This model is grounded in constructivism [the theory that people construct knowledge through experience and reflection] and, in particular, how individuals interpret their experiences with diverse others in intercultural situations” (p. 577). Intercultural competency can be a difficult concept to measure. Anderson and Lawton (2011) recognize this challenge by stating “the assessment of academic competence achieved as part of a study abroad program is routinely accomplished with the submission of course grades. There is, however, no similar mechanism for assessing whether desired intercultural competency are achieved” (p. 87). However, like Baxter Magolda and King’s (2009) three trajectories, the DMIS is also a useful model in that it provides different levels to show how a person can make a shift from an initial level of development to a mature level of development. The DMIS is broken up into three ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, minimization) and three ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration). Bennett (1993) refers to the ethnocentric stage as “assuming that the worldview of one’s own culture is central to all reality” (p.30) and the ethnorelative stage as “the assumption that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context” (p.46). This model is key to helping interpret how a student is developing intercultural competency by following how they move from one stage to the next. Like the research stated above, this model reflects the idea that a student will not gain intercultural competency by simply being in a

country, but by how the student constructs meaning of their experiences. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) state that, “The underlying assumption of the model is that as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one’s potential competence in intercultural relations increases” (p. 423).

While a vast amount of this research does a thorough job of exploring the challenges students face in gaining intercultural competency abroad and ways that these challenges can be measured, there is a need for more students’ voices. A majority of the research contains very little qualitative data, and even research that does, like Marx and Moss (2011), has only qualitative data from one student. Collecting qualitative data from multiple students is necessary in order to see if students are gaining intercultural competency abroad and how they are perceiving their intercultural competency gain. Qualitative data from study abroad staff is also important since they are primary stakeholders in how study abroad programs are developed, and they play a large role in helping students go abroad. This study contributes to the field by adding a number of student and staff voices to intercultural competency gain research. I will further expand upon my research site and methods in the next section.

Research Site

I conducted my research at a small, public college on the east coast where I have been serving as the Study Away Assistant for the past year. My primary role is to advise students on the number of study abroad programs they can participate on and help them through the study abroad application process. The college is part of a larger state university system, and the students are allowed to participate on any study abroad program within the system. This means that the majority of the students do not participate on third-party programs because the students

have access to over 500 programs as party of the state university study abroad system. All of the students I interviewed went through the state university system. The college at which I work sends about 100-200 students abroad a year on a variety of direct enrollment, exchange, and faculty-led programs. Some of the goals for the study abroad programs include encouraging the awareness of other cultures and global issues.

Research Design

Due to the lack of student voices in the research stated above, I used a qualitative method to collect data. I focused on gathering in-depth information from students and study abroad staff members at small, public college to understand what is working and not working in regards to intercultural competency gain on study abroad programs. Hesse-Bieber and Leavy (2011) state, “Qualitative researchers try to extract meaning from their data” (p. 4). This meaning carries a level of depth within a more restricted sample that quantitative data can often lack. This depth is needed to understand the lived experiences related to intercultural competency. Interviews are more effective than gathering quantitative data, because I was able to use the students’ stories and detailed information to derive meaning from their experiences and better understand themes in intercultural competency gain. Harper and Kuh (2007) also echo this importance of making meaning from qualitative data by stating, “Equipped with this [qualitative] information, institutional researchers will be able to better understand what is happening to students and the institutional conditions that foster certain dimensions of learning and personal development” (p. 12). By listening to students about their experiences abroad, this study attempted to shed light on how higher education institutions can create study abroad programs that can better assist students in gaining intercultural competency.

In order to gather data about the students' experiences abroad and the study abroad staff's experience developing study abroad programs, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews. I believe interviews are the most effective because each student has a unique experience when they study abroad, and an interview helped me better understand their experiences. Interviews are more appropriate than surveys because the type of questions I asked required a more lengthy response, and I thought students would not be as willing to answer those questions if it required long, written answers. Considering I only used interviews to collect data, I triangulated my understanding of intercultural competency gain during study abroad by interviewing seven students who studied abroad within the last year (eight were emailed an interview request), four students who are currently studying abroad (ten were emailed an interview request), and two study abroad staff members. In total, I performed interviews with 13 individuals (See Table 1 below for a list of participants).

Interview Participants

Table 1: Students Who Studied Abroad Within The Last Year

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Current Year</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Year Studied Abroad</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Program</u>
Brad	M	Junior	Accounting	First semester, Junior year	Germany	Through other college in state system
Laura	F	Senior	International Business	First semester, Senior year	France	Through home college
Tyler	M	Senior	Criminal Justice	Second semester, Junior year	Australia	Through home college
Jack	M	Junior	Audio/Radio Production	First semester, Junior year	England	Through home college

Amanda	F	Senior	Public Relations	First semester, Senior year	Italy	Through other college in state system
James	M	Senior	Business Management	First semester, Senior year	Spain	Through other college in state system
Katie	F	Senior	Business Administration	Second semester, Junior year	Spain	Through home college

Table 2: Students Who Are Currently Studying Abroad for a Semester

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Current Year</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Program</u>
Cindy	F	Senior	International Business and Marketing	Ireland	Through other college in state system
Veronica	F	Junior	International Business and Marketing	Italy	Through other college in state system
Ellie	F	Sophomore	Early Childhood Education	Ireland	Through other college in state system
George	M	Junior	Hospitality Management	Australia	Through home college

Table 3: Study Abroad Staff Members

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Title</u>
Christine	F	Associate Director
Sarah	F	Study Abroad Advisor

In order to select student interviewees, I used a mix of purposive (using specific, intentional selection for my interviewees) and snowball (using a known network to help select

appropriate interviewees) sampling methods (Hesse-Bieber and Leavy, 2011). The sampling was purposive in the sense that it represented a mix of study abroad locations and gender. The students I interviewed who studied in the same location studied on different programs in different parts of the country. I used snowball sampling because I received recommendations of students to reach out to from the Study Abroad Advisor. I also used our Terra Dotta software, StudioAbroad, which is used to store our study abroad students' application data, to look up information on where students studied abroad the last two years and also where students are studying abroad now. I then emailed individual students I was interested in interviewing. As stated earlier, the response rate was much higher for students who had recently studied abroad than students who are currently studying abroad.

Interviews took place in March. When interviewing the students, I made it clear to them that my position as the Study Away Assistant should in no way affect how they answered the questions. I wanted them to answer truthfully and honestly. For the students who are currently studying abroad, I conducted Skype interviews that averaged around 30 minutes (see Interview questions in Appendix A). For the students who recently studied abroad, I held one-on-one in person interviews in either my office or a colleague's office. These interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes (also see Interview questions in appendix A).

I also interviewed the other Study Abroad Advisor and the Associate Director in the study abroad office. These are the two main points of contact in our office of five people. These interviews were done one-on-one, in the staff member's office, and lasted around 20 minutes (see Interview questions in appendix A). It was important for me to interview the staff members to see what their perception was on how our students are gaining intercultural competency abroad, and also what they thought our programs were doing right and what could be improved.

For all of the interviews, I recorded them on my password-protected iPhone with the interviewees' consent. Interviewees signed an informed consent form (Appendix B) prior to the interview, and I let them know that if at any time they felt uncomfortable with the interview, they were free to withdraw from the study. I have protected my interviewees' identities by not naming the college and by using a pseudonym for all of my participants to preserve confidentiality and also so that they felt they could be completely honest in their answers.

Once I completed the interviews, I transcribed the audio and then coded the information using the software NVivo. I used thematic analysis (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011) to look for patterns in my data in regards to what is and is not helping students gain intercultural competency abroad (Appendix C). I was primarily interested to see how often students brought up guided reflection during their study abroad experience and if they experienced any difficulty breaking from their American friend group and embracing the host culture's values and customs. I deleted the recorded interviews once I completed the transcripts and have made the transcripts non-identifiable.

Limitations

While this research helps contribute to the field of International Education, there are a number of limitations as well. While I interviewed students who recently studied abroad and are currently studying abroad, it would have been much more effective to interview students throughout the phase of their entire study abroad experience (pre-departure, departure, and return). This would have allowed me to see how a student's intercultural competency develops throughout the study abroad experience. However, this was not possible due to time constraints.

Another possible limitation could be that with my experience studying abroad, while I felt like a component of intercultural understanding was missing when I returned, I did not fully

understand the lack of intercultural competency gain on my program until I did more traveling and studying later in life. This could also be true for the students I interviewed, who may not fully comprehend their achievement or lack of achievement of intercultural competency until a few years later.

I also wonder if the students who chose to participate in this study naturally have a higher amount of intercultural competency gain because of their willingness to talk about this topic and their experience. For example, only four of the ten students responded to my interview request who are currently abroad. This could just be due to students not checking their school email or it could be lack of interest in the topic. Students who may not be having a very intercultural experience abroad also might have seen the title of this study and decided that they did not want to participate. This might have led the study to be more one-sided.

This research is also grounded in student self-reporting, so the information collected may not have always have been completely accurate. While I told the students beforehand to be open and honest with me about their study abroad experience, there is still the possibility that what they state did not always reflect the truth of their experiences.

Finally, I collected data from a small sample size at one college. As a result, this data is not generalizable and certainly cannot apply to every study abroad program at every higher education institution. I was also not able to interview as many students who are currently abroad due to the lack of response from those students. Nonetheless, the project will help to further substantiate evidence concerning students' intercultural learning, filling a gap in the literature and making an important contribution to the field.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Analysis of data collected revealed that each student I interviewed had unique experiences abroad that allowed me to see what elements were or were not working to help them become more interculturally competent. While only one student discussed a faculty member who served as a cultural mentor being a component of their study abroad experience, other factors helped the students become more open-minded to learn about and engage with other cultures. These factors included support from a professor or program coordinator, the types of classes the students took, and interactions with international students and the locals. When those factors were not present, students seemed to have a much more difficult time immersing themselves in the culture and making sense of different cultural values. In addition to the students, the study abroad staff members I interviewed discussed the challenges that come with students gaining intercultural competency that are often brought on due to program design and student motivation. They also reflected on how they thought their programs were succeeding and also areas that needed improvement, such as re-entry evaluation. Each section below presents the findings from both the student and staff interviews. I will start by addressing the in-country factors that impacted students' intercultural competency gain. I will then assess each student's level of development and experience and also how far the students came in their intercultural competency during their time abroad by consulting Baxter Magolda and King's (2009) three trajectories and well as Bennett's (1993) DMIS.

Cultural Mentor

While only one student mentioned having a cultural mentor on his program, the positive impact that it left on the student demonstrates the need for more study abroad programs to incorporate this element. James, who spent a semester in Spain and who was the only student I

interviewed who went on this program, frequently referenced a faculty member whose specific role was to serve as a cultural mentor. Pedro was the in-country Program Coordinator who worked for one of the colleges that was a part of the state university system that James studied abroad through. James' program had an element, which I now believe to be quite unique, in that it was required for the nine students on the program to participate in a three-credit cultural class led by Pedro. The students in James' program would meet with Pedro every other weekend and they would spend the majority of the weekend going to museums or cultural sites. Throughout the day, the group would stop and have a coffee or a meal and have discussions about the different places they visited that day and ask questions about Spanish culture. James continuously referenced Pedro throughout our interview and how much of an impact he had on his experience abroad in terms of understanding and being immersed in the culture. James stated:

I mean, it was like the whole point of the program. It's like, 'You're going, so he'll be here for you and get you out there.' We would be with him from like 8 am to like 7 pm. And half of that was like eating and drinking, but that's like the whole point. We would have a lot of discussion and ask questions. . . I'm so glad that we did our school and had our director because we would be lost without him and when we met him we were like 'What have we been doing without him?' (Interview, Student, Spain)

Pedro's style of mentoring greatly reflects that of Vande Berg's (2009) definition of a cultural mentor as someone who guides and supports the students throughout their intercultural understanding. Pedro's style of creating a relaxed, casual atmosphere by holding discussions outside of the classroom in a café or restaurant also echoes Marx and Moss (2011) idea that cultural mentors create a safe space for their students to engage in discussions about culture and ask questions.

James also commented on Pedro being very personable and that he genuinely cared about the students getting out in the Spanish culture. James stated:

We actually became very close with him and he was the nicest. He's actually an art professor and his wife is an artist and they have two daughters and they would all come together to the events. It was so nice how he got us immersed in the culture. We could even text him any questions we had. He was just there for us. He would send us information like, 'My brother is in band, do you guys want to go to this bar? Me and my wife will be there.' So he even did stuff that was out of the program just to immerse us in the culture. He would tell us about events to go to even if we didn't ask. He went above and beyond. He just wanted us to experience everything (Interview, Student, Spain).

According to the student, Pedro also showed great consideration for how the students grew throughout the experience. James said that at the end of the semester, Pedro asked the students to write a reflection paper, comparing their lives in the US to their lives in Spain. James said the experience of writing the paper allowed him to come full-circle and see how he changed. He said:

I feel like it was very helpful and even at times I was choking up like 'Oh my god, I can't believe this' and just looking at the beginning to the end and seeing the change. It's like a story. And I think he wanted to see what we had to say, but I think it was more that he wanted us to see what we had to say (Interview, Student, Spain).

Pedro implemented the cultural reflection that Marx and Moss (2011) believe is crucial in helping students make sense of their time abroad and increase their intercultural development. What made Pedro such a successful cultural mentor is that he really brought the students out into the culture instead of just lecturing in a classroom. He also displayed genuine interest in the

students' needs and development while also being a fun and engaging figure for the students to interact with. James believed that without Pedro, his experience would have been vastly different and he's not sure if he would have had the same kind of development and understanding of Spanish culture without Pedro. James' experience abroad and development will be discussed further in the sections below.

Professor and Program Coordinator Support

While the other students did not have a cultural mentor like Pedro, two students-Ellie, who is currently abroad in Ireland, and Katie, who studied in Spain-did have faculty members who provided a great deal of support and helped to immerse them in the culture. On the other side is Amanda, who studied abroad in Italy, whose on-site program staff actually limited her intercultural competency development. This section explores the role of professor and program coordinator support in students' developing intercultural competency.

I begin first with the positive experience of the student who is currently abroad. Ellie's program has an on-site Program Director, Patrick, who is Irish and works for a third-party provider. While Ellie did not go through a third-party, her program allows her to utilize Patrick as a resource and support system. Unlike Pedro, Patrick does not lead a class. However, Ellie said that Patrick has been a valuable support for her to have in understanding different elements of the Irish culture and also providing ways for her to get involved in the culture. She said:

He tries to get us involved in Irish culture and brings us on all these excursions. Like we're going to the Cliffs of Moher and other places, and all these times, we're on the bus or train with him and we just have hours to talk and get to know each other and get to know him too (Interview, Student, Ireland).

The students in her program can also always text or go to Patrick for suggestions on places to go, events to attend, or just to ask questions about Ireland in general. Ellie used the example of recently asking Patrick about an Irish phrase that she did not understand.

We definitely find it hard because a lot the things they say [in English] are different than ours. Just different kind of words like 'Pass me that yoke' ['Pass me that thing']. So I would ask him about that and he would just laugh and tell us. Or they spell their names differently because it's in Gaelic sometimes. So a name like Owen does not sound or look like it. So we would ask him those questions. And he find it funny cause like we have no idea and he's just telling us about it. He's pretty cool (Interview, Student, Ireland).

Unlike Ellie, Katie did not have a Program Director to assist her when she was in Spain, but she did speak highly of a professor who taught her Organizational Behavior course, who she still keeps in contact with today. She said that he was very relaxed and always willing to answer questions and wanted to know what the students were doing on the weekends. She said:

He definitely made sure that we wanted to ask questions and learn more about the culture. And he was very helpful and shard photos of his family. He was just so welcoming and he was curious about our culture too. So it was fun to just go back and forth (Interview, Student, Spain).

Katie referenced one example where over her spring break, which was Holy Week for the Spaniards, she witnessed a procession in the south of Spain that involved extravagant floats and a number of people crying. Katie said that when she returned to her host university she immediately told her professor and she said:

He wanted to know how I felt and what I thought of the experience. I asked him questions about the culture and he got serious about it too because it means a lot to them

since it's such a Catholic, religious country. So that was definitely eye-opening
(Interview, Student, Spain).

While Ellie and Katie had positive experiences with faculty members abroad, Amanda did not have that same supportive experience. Amanda said that in Italy there was Tiffany, the on-site Program Director. There was also Lisa, the Global Education Advisor, from the college that facilitated the program Amanda participated in. Lisa was in Italy just for orientation week. Both of these staff members are American. Amanda said that for orientation week, Tiffany, Lisa and a few school administrators told them about different cultural aspects to be aware of, but Amanda felt that the information was delivered in a format that was uncomfortable for her. She said that gender was one of the bigger topics that was addressed:

They said 'If a man says something to you, don't talk back' and for me, my parents taught me to respect your elders, but like if I feel like you're disrespecting me, I'm going to say something back to you. So for me, that was hard to swallow and just like, let it go because I'm not like that. . . They told you things like be prepared for men to stare at you. They were kind of just like 'Don't question it.' which I felt was kind of weird. It was kind of a 'Don't ask, don't tell kind of thing.' I would have liked more of a discussion
(Interview, Student, Italy).

In Italy, Amanda often struggled with how women were treated, but she explained that she never had the opportunity to discuss how she felt or learn about gender and women's rights in Italy. Amanda's experience reflected Bennett's (2010) theory that just being in a country does not automatically lead to intercultural understanding. This was proven further when Amanda brought up general assumptions about women in Italy, which I will discuss in a later section.

In addition to how Tiffany and Lisa handled orientation, Amanda felt that they did not demonstrate the genuine consideration in the students' intercultural growth that someone like Pedro or Katie's professor showed. She said that Tiffany held a group midterm meeting to check on how people were doing but didn't really push for much discussion among the students. She also said that after orientation, Lisa only ever reached out to them students one other time, and that was to see if they could provide pictures from their Halloween party, a request which Amanda felt was unusual.

From the examples stated above, on-site faculty play a large role in how a student makes sense of their host culture and experience abroad. While cultural mentors and faculty support can play a large role in how students achieve intercultural competency, the students also often mentioned the importance of the classes they took or are taking while abroad. Classes specific to cultural understanding allowed the students to have greater intercultural competency gain.

Classes and Culture

Despite the above examples, Peckenpaugh's (2014) statement that cultural mentors may not be feasible for all study abroad programs certainly applies to the majority of the study abroad programs in which the students in this study participated. However, the students who took and are taking culture courses seem more likely to have experienced intercultural competency growth. In this way, the findings from this present study also reflect William's (2005) findings that intercultural competency can be achieved through other methods beside cultural mentors.

For example, Jamie, the Associate Director at the state college I currently work at, said that in regards to students taking cultural courses abroad:

We always encourage that. I mean, I certainly believe that and it seems like the students really get a lot out of that. And for the most part, with our partners, they should mostly

have the opportunity to do that on pretty much all of our programs and probably the majority of other [state university system] programs too (Interview).

Findings demonstrate that a majority of the students interviewed did take some type of cultural course. The students spoke highly of these courses and often said that they were their favorite courses. Below, I provide examples to demonstrate this conclusion.

To begin, Ellie discussed the importance of taking classes that focus on cultural studies. In addition to two psychology courses, she is taking Ireland in a Global Context and Physical Geography of Ireland. When I asked her what made her want to take the two classes that specifically focused on Ireland, she said:

Well, I figured if I'm going to be studying in their country, I should get to know it more through education means. So I figured that studying abroad, I'll see a million things outside and go to different places, but this is my only opportunity to study and get the education purposes for it (Interview, Student, Ireland).

In addition, Ellie said that her classes have also allowed for her to reflect on being an American and the influence that the United States has on other countries. In her Ireland in the Global Context course, she says:

We reflect on how America influences Ireland and I feel like they view America so highly and they believe what happens in America reflects back to their country. That's why they're always hoping for the best for America because they think that whatever happens to us is going to go back to them (Interview, Student, Ireland).

Similarly, Brad, who studied abroad in Germany, enrolled in an English language program that specifically focused on German culture. The program included German Folk Life, German History, Applied Geography of Germany, and German Law. Brad said:

It helped me understand a lot. I mean, it was a lot of information, but there were a lot of interesting facts that I would have never known before just about the history of Germany, their customs. I mean, if you were kind of worried about cultural differences or not knowing what to expect, those would be great classes to take just because it really gives you a good understanding (Interview, Student, Germany).

In addition to learning about German culture, Brad also learned about the cultures of the other international students in his classes. He used the example of his German Law class:

There would be a lot of discussion involved like ‘How does this differ in your country?’ When you have a classroom full of students from all over Europe and U.S. and Canada and you’re talking about a certain law, you get a good discussion going about everyone’s country (Interview, Student, Germany).

Laura also had a similar positive experience with the classes she took abroad. She studied abroad in France at a business school. While her school predominately offered business courses, Laura was also able to enroll in a class called Cultural Diversity. Laura credits this class to helping her understand French culture, as well as learn more about her own culture as an American. Her class discussed how to effectively work with cultures internationally, as well as the Hofstede dimensions (Bennett, 2009), which looks at how a society’s cultural values can affect cross-cultural communication. When I asked her if she thinks her experience would have been different if she didn’t take that class, she replied:

Yeah, I think it would be. It would have been different because taking those classes really helped me understand what I was going through with that process of studying abroad. But if I had taken maybe a supply chain class, or an accounting class, I feel like that wouldn’t have helped me engage with the intercultural aspect of my education. It would have been

more just business, which I can take here, I can take anywhere (Interview, Student, France).

Some students also expressed the desire to have taken more culturally focused classes. Veronica, who is currently studying abroad in Italy, is taking primarily marketing and finance classes with other visiting international students. She said that there is an Italian history/culture course that some of her roommates are taking:

I do actually wish I had taken it just because it seems so cool and interesting. It just didn't work out for me with my credits, but I think it would have been beneficial. Like my roommates go to these places around Rome that aren't the touristy things and they get information about that. Like, they went to the Jewish ghetto, which I had known about from just looking up Rome, but they got the whole history on it. So that definitely would have been beneficial to me so I would have known a little bit more about Rome and its culture (Interview, Student, Italy).

Veronica also said that while certain cultural topics were brought up in class, they were never discussed at length, and she wondered if that would have been different if she took a class that solely focused on the culture. She used the example of a student who said he learned in another classes that 70% of Italian men cheat on their wives or girlfriends:

And my professor, whose a woman, just kind of brushed it off, and then from our shocked reaction, she has a defensive reaction of like, 'Why do you guys think that's wrong? That's just the way it is.' So that was something that was mind blowing because that's not accepted in the U.S. (Interview, Student, Italy).

Veronica said that this often happened where certain cultural aspects of Italy would be brought up in class occasionally but never discussed at length.

Similarly, Katie, who earlier discussed the positive experience she had with the guidance provided from her professor in Spain, also stated that she wished she took a more culturally focused class:

If I wasn't so crammed with my business degree courses here, I would have taken a culture class to give myself a little bit more information from a local professor. Because some of the students who I became very close friends with, they were in the culture program¹ and they were always discussing the history and local politics and it sounded really cool. My business classes were great but I wish I could have taken one culture class (Interview, Katie, Spain).

Veronica and Katie both expressed the desire to take cultural classes, but also the limitation of being able to take those classes due to the necessity of having to take classes for their majors. After hearing how beneficial these cultural courses were for many of the students, it seemed like perhaps it should be a requirement for students to take some type of cultural course when they are abroad. However, that requirement seems difficult to implement after hearing Veronica and Katie's reasoning, as well as a point that Sarah, the Study Abroad Advisor, brought up:

It's [a cultural course] not required, but it's highly recommended, But again, I think especially, too, in the age of financial aid compliance, making sure these 12 credits are financially aid compliant, students can absolutely do it but I think they just need to make sure that it fits in with their degree path in some way, shape or form (Interview, Staff).

This becomes a very difficult balance when a study abroad advisor wants the students to have a culturally rich experience abroad by taking cultural courses, but they also want to make sure the

¹ Katie's program in Spain has two tracks for study abroad students, the Business and International Relations Program and the Language and Culture Program.

student is sticking to the academic track that they have set up with their academic advisor. If a student cannot take cultural courses, another option for them to have a cultural experience is to have the opportunity to live and interact with other international students or locals.

Interaction with International Students and Locals

In addition to taking cultural courses, Williams (2005) states that having frequent interactions with those of other backgrounds can lead to great intercultural understanding. The following section demonstrates the benefits that many of the students experienced from interacting with non-Americans. Sarah, the Study Abroad Advisor, echoed this importance of getting to know people from other cultural backgrounds by stating:

I think if there is some way to recognize that you do have this unique group of students with you, that they're not going to be there for a degree, they're there for four months to maybe a year. If there's a way to structure some activities where they are having meaningful interactions with their domestic students. I think that would be a great to kind of facilitate those intercultural communication and skill building pieces (Interview, Staff).

Many of the students commented on the interactions, or lack of interactions, they were able to have with local students inside and outside of the classroom, as well as other international students attending the university. These interactions seemed to be influenced by both how much motivation the student had to meet other non-American students, as well as how the program was structured to encourage those interactions. Sarah later brought up an important question to ask when looking at a program and how it encourages intercultural competency gain, “Does this program allow students to access courses along with regular university or is it a tailored program where the student is taking all classes with American students?” (Interview, Staff)

Brad was fortunate to have the opportunity to interact with a mix of international students and local German students. He lived in an international dorm with two students from Africa and he would frequently spend time with other German students. When I asked him if there were other American students, he said there were only a few:

I tried to stay away from them cause they were nice, but you're studying abroad in Germany. You don't want to hang out with American citizens over there. It's something you don't really want to do (Interview, Student, Germany).

Brad was very aware of the fact that international students often clump together since he has frequently seen that at his home campus and made it a point to challenge himself to not do the same. While Engle and Engle (2004) believe that most study abroad students don't have the motivation or desire to push themselves outside of their comfort zone, Brad demonstrates that that isn't necessarily always true.

Many of the students often wanted to make an effort in getting to know non-American students. Like Brad, Ellie is also making a point to not only talk to other American students while she is in Ireland. Ellie actually lives in a suite with five other Americans. She said:

I like it, but I wish there were more people from other countries who I could get to know better. I do find it [spending time with mostly Americans] weird actually. And this sounds mean, but I try to like not hang out with other Americans as much as I can because I'm abroad and I don't want to hang out with other Americans. It sounds odd, but when we hang out after class or get lunch or something, we always try to bring along some Irish students with us and just mingle more into the group (Interview, Student, Ireland).

Ellie seemed to think it was almost a bad thing that she didn't want to spend time with the other Americans. Fortunately, Ellie has also taken steps, such as the one she describes, to meet other international students, even though her living situation is not the most ideal.

Unlike Ellie, Cindy, who is also currently studying abroad in Ireland, lives with other international students and she is grateful to not only be surrounded by Americans. Right now, she is living with a fellow American, but also a German and French girl in her suite:

I wish we did have an Irish person with us as well. But I think it's really cool being able to see how you think differently and just getting to learn about each other's backgrounds. We were told that the building next door, there are a lot of Americans living there. So I think they just kind of divide it up, which I don't know, I'm glad that we're in this building. It's nice to be in something different, that you're not expecting (Interview, Student, Ireland).

While Cindy wished there were more Irish students in her suite, as well as her classes, she has had the chance to interact frequently with the international students on campus. She talked about one group project she recently worked on:

Like yesterday I worked with two kids from Germany, a kid from Bosnia and a kid from France. Just trying to figure out what to put into our paper and what we wanted to focus on. We all had different ideas on what we thought was the most important part to focus on, which I thought was cool because maybe in their hometowns, homeschools, that's what they would have to focus on. So it was cool having all these different insights (Interview, Student, Ireland).

While Cindy hasn't had the opportunities so far to interact with many Irish students meaningfully, she is nonetheless learning the skills to interact with those from other cultural backgrounds.

Like the other students stated above, Jack, who studied abroad in England, pushed himself to meet other foreign students and locals. Jack often commented on how happy he was with the university he studied at abroad because it was so welcoming and had events for all of the international students to get to know each other. Jack was also one of the few Americans on campus and his roommates were from all across Europe. Unlike many of the students interviewed, Jack was able to easily meet the other British students and one of them ended up becoming a close friend. He credits joining a very casual club with the opportunity to meet the British students:

It was easy to interact with a lot of people. I did join a club, [name of host university] Rock Appreciation Society, where we would all listen to rock music as a bar. I felt like I met more people that way. The Brits are definitely more reserved people, but when you met people, it was when you went to go out at one of the campus bars and talk with people and have a good time, which was pretty often (Interview, Student, England).

Similarly, Tyler, who recently studied in Australia, and George, who is currently studying in Australia were also able to find ways to interact with the international students and locals. Tyler lived in a single room, but his dorm was made up of international students from across the world. While abroad, his friend group mainly consisted of students from Canada, Malaysia and India. Tyler said that he also lived in an area that was made up of mostly non-students. He said:

The reason I became friends with them [the non-student locals] is because we had this downstairs bar so like almost every couple of days, I would go down there and it would

just be me and them so we just, like, kicked it off. I interacted with them more in an open, social situation. And I really got to see what they say and feel. It was interesting

(Interview, Student, Australia).

Like Jack, Tyler found it easy to interact with locals in a more casual, social setting. Tyler also referenced sports as a way to meet international students. He played basketball almost every single day and he became friends with students from different parts of Asia. He said, “They play differently, and it was cool to meet up with a different culture like that and hang out with them everyday” (Interview, Student, Australia).

George also credited sports to help him meet international students as well as the Australian students. He said:

I’m on the soccer team here so it’s like a club team. All the Australians and Europeans play and I’m on the team with like three Norwegians and four Germans. It’s a really easy way to meet people (Interview, Student, Australia).

Also like Jack, George said that his university provided welcoming activities to encourage the international students to get to know one another. In regards to one ice breaker event, he said, “I was meeting people from all around the world, like right off the bat. So that was really cool how they set that up” (Interview, Student, Australia). George also said that the school is made up of mostly Australian and European students, and he is able to meet a lot of the Australian students in his classes. He believes that even though he’s taken courses specific to his major instead of cultural courses, he is still having an authentic cultural experience because of the students he interacts with on a daily basis.

Amanda, who experienced the difficulties stated earlier with the on-site faculty members in Italy, had a different experience than the other students previously mentioned because she

lived and studied primarily with students from America. She lived with four other American girls and one girl from London in her apartment. Although there were other Italian families in her building, she found it difficult to interact with them. She also did not get a chance to interact with Italian students because her university was an American style university, so most of the students in her classes were from the U.S. In regards to anything she would have done differently on the program, she said, “I would have gone out more and met more people. I could have also been more interactive with the culture” (Interview, Student, Italy).

Veronica also lives with four other girls from America in her apartment in Italy. Her building also has other Italian families, and so far she has only been able to say a few “hellos” and “goodbyes” to her neighbors. One of her goals is to be able to have an authentic, Italian dinner with one of her neighboring families. She is making the attempt though to learn some vocabulary in Italian that she uses when shopping for groceries or taking a taxi. By the end of the semester, Veronica could be having her dream dinner with an Italian family or she may be wishing, like Amanda, that she met more people and exposed herself more to the culture.

These student experiences show that when students interact with international or local students abroad, whether that be through their living situation, in the classroom, or through a club, they are able to develop a greater cultural understanding. Study abroad programs should find different ways to encourage these interactions so that students come away with an increase in their intercultural competency. The students’ ability and inability to interact with the culture and other international students often ties back to not only the program structure, but also to where the student is developmentally and their motivation to have intercultural experiences. Taking the student’s development and motivation into account, I consulted Baxter Magolda and King’s (2009) three trajectories, as well as Bennett’s (1993) DMIS to see how the students

shifted in their intercultural competency gain during their time abroad. This is the topic of the next section.

Student Development and Intercultural Competency Gain

Every student I interviewed came in with different travel and cultural experiences, as well as personal experiences and motivations. This background seems to have impacted how much interaction they had with the host culture as well as the amount of intercultural competency they gained. As Christine, the Associate Director, stated in regards to how students achieve intercultural competency:

It certainly depends on the student and what they're trying to get out of the experience.

Everyone is also going in to this at different starting points in their current cultural competency, so I think it probably depends where they're at and what they want to get out of it (Interview, Staff).

Sarah, the Study Abroad Advisor, echoed this by saying:

I think it could be individual self-determination, maybe. If they get there, and they haven't really thought about their reasons or their motivations for why they wanted to go abroad. So maybe they'd have a tougher time transitioning and meeting people that are actual local students. I think sometimes with students who go abroad, especially if it's a non-English speaking country, they may default on relying on their American friends (Interview, Staff).

Referring back to Baxter Magolda and King (2005), students are at an important developmental stage where they are learning to shift frames of references and develop opinions, and some of these students may have needed additional guidance to help them through this process. Some of the student stories below also reflect Anderson and Lawton's (2011) belief that a student's prior

international and domestic experiences will greatly influence a student's intercultural experience, which also affected the student's desire to interact with local and international students. This in turn will affect their intercultural competency gain.

With the assistance of Baxter Magolda and King's (2009) three trajectories and the DMIS (Bennett, 1993), I was able to get a better understanding of how the students' responses demonstrated their overall intercultural competency gain. Sarah, the Study Abroad Advisor, stated that her hope for the students who study abroad is that "they will expose themselves to different cultures and open up their mindsets to different perspectives and opinions, and just become more well-rounded human beings" (Interview, Staff). Christine, the Associate Director echoed this as well by stating, "We're hoping that it's personally fulfilling in the students develop more appreciation for international topics, different cultures, and that they're developing hopefully an awareness of an increased cultural competency in themselves" (Interview, Staff). I was interested to see if the students were achieving those goals. Christine also mentioned that while there is currently no method in place to evaluate if these students are meeting those goals, she is planning on creating a survey once their new website is fully developed. This she hopes will also help the students continue to reflect on their experience abroad even when they return home.

When looking at Tyler's experience, he had only traveled outside of the country once and he said he had very little contact with international students prior to studying in Australia. However, when he went to Australia, he made it a point to get to know the other international students. As he stated earlier, he would go out and play basketball every day with some of the students from Asia:

Even when I first started playing with the guys on the basketball court, at first I didn't know if they wanted to me to talk to them. I didn't know how it was at first. But after a game or two, I went over and was like 'Good game guys' and they would be like 'Oh thanks.' They were just shy at first, and I can be shy too, so once I got past that initial point, I knew it was all good. It definitely opened my mind (Interview, Student, Australia).

As Tyler stated earlier, he also often went to the bar in his apartment alone and he would meet some of the locals in the area. Tyler was clearly a more motivated individual. While Tyler had very little international experience, his reflection on his time he spent with the international students showed that he was more in the acceptance stage of the DMIS and at an intermediate level of interpersonal development. Tyler said that he didn't interact with the international students on campus before he went abroad and had very little awareness of other cultures. However, when he went abroad, he made much for an effort to interact with the other international students and even if it was through a small action, like playing basketball, he became much aware of the value that comes with spending time with people from different backgrounds.

Similar to Tyler, George also stated that he didn't know much about other cultures before going to Australia and he had also never been out of the country. However, he believes that his adaptable personality and his motivation to meet other people has been what has helped him the most:

When I got here, I mean, I definitely felt comfortable because I can adapt to changes really quickly. So after the first week I was here, I was fine. I feel like I didn't have that much of a culture shock, but I guess that's because I'm really good at adapting to the

culture and changing of the environments. So then when I talked to other people from different countries, it just felt natural for me. Because I knew they were not [from] where I'm from, so I had an open mind talking to them (Interview, Student, Australia).

For someone who has never been out of the country, a country like Australia seems to be a good stepping stone for George to push himself outside of his comfort zone and meet other international students. He has also made more of an effort to interact with the other international students, especially because the university in Australia sets up events to encourage that interaction. George commented on enjoying the more laid back and relaxed culture, but he seemed to have a more difficult time articulating what he's learned from being in another culture. It's a little challenging to gauge what stage he is at in the DMIS or in the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal trajectory. This could be because, like some of the other students, he doesn't have someone abroad to help him reflect on what he's learning and the different cultural aspects. As Williams (2009) noted, a student who is encouraged to reflect on their experience and what they learn, will be able to better articulate examples of how they gained intercultural competence.

Unlike Tyler and George, Jack, who studied in England, had quite a bit of cultural exposure before going abroad and came from a more non-traditional upbringing:

I've traveled quite a bit before going to England: Bermuda, Costa Rica, Ireland, Thailand, Burma, South Korea, Mexico, Canada, France, U.S. Virgin Islands. I had traveled around quite a bit and I was raised a little differently. My parents were Hindu so a different kind of upbringing. I have an older brother who lives in Burma now. I was there when I was 16 to volunteer teaching English. After being over there for a month, now it's like [sarcastically] 'Yes, I'm going to England. How dangerous' (Interview, Student, England).

Although Jack had quite a bit of international experience, he picked that particular university because of the amount of student support they provided, and he felt that he was at a point in his life where he needed that kind of support. However, he was also one of the few students who formed a very close bond with a local student while he was abroad, so he also had the motivation and self-determination to push himself. This ease in forming these relationships could be due to Jack's extensive experience traveling and living abroad. Jack clearly has an interest in learning about cultures and meeting people from around the world. When asked about the advice he would give to students who are going abroad, he said, "You're there to experience a new culture. Going out and exploring takes priority, god damn it. And most people don't realize that" (Interview). Jack most likely shifted from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelativistic on the view on the DMIS much earlier in his life, especially giving his experience living abroad. his parents' Hindu background.

Similarly to Jack, Ellie, who is trying to make friends outside of her American friend group while living in Ireland, also demonstrated self-determination and had more prior experience interacting with other cultures:

I don't find it hard to just introduce myself and go up to anyone to talk with. Also, living so close to New York City, I see a big diverse group of people. I have a lot of friends who are actually Irish. My family owns a restaurant in the Bronx so a lot of people come in from there and they have their children and stuff so I met them through that. A lot of my town in East Chester is also very Italian, so a lot of people are from Italy (Interview, Student, Ireland).

Ellie seems to be at a more intermediate level of development. When I asked Ellie what caused her the most culture shock about living in Ireland, she said, "The thing that is different is

their way of life. They're very laid back compared to home and everything is much slower over here" (Student, Interview, Ireland). When I asked her if that is causing her to reevaluate being an American, she said:

Yeah it definitely has made me think about it and I definitely want to bring it back with me when I go home because everyone at home I feel is so stressed and doing their daily activities. It doesn't have to be that way and you could not be stressed all the time (Interview, Student, Ireland).

Instead of critiquing the more laid back Irish lifestyle, she embraced it and decided to incorporate it when she returns home.

While Cindy did not speak to as much about self-determination as Ellie, she did comment on how the structure of her classes in Ireland are allowing her to develop more confidence, which she felt she didn't have as much of in the United States:

I think the strength for the school is that they do really engage everyone into a group discussion. Like, no matter what class you're in, you're going to be engaging in class with somebody because it's required. I was definitely nervous about it because back home I did not talk to anybody in class, never. I never really felt comfortable opening up to kids in class. But here, like I have to talk to people, which is not bad at all. And I noticed kids don't leave classrooms right away here. Like back home it's like 'Okay I'm done with class, I am getting out of here' But here, kids sit around after the teacher leaves and everybody talks (Interview, Student, Ireland).

Cindy also said that she now has the confidence to talk with locals and ask questions, whether it's in class, on the train or at a pub.

Like Ellie, Cindy is also embracing the Irish lifestyle and she has also been reflecting on herself more as an American. Cindy also made reference to the more laidback lifestyle. And while she found it a bit of a challenge at first, she has now embraced it. As she mentioned in the previous section, she has also enjoyed working in groups with the international students so that she can better understand different perspectives. Cindy also said:

I think I'm more aware though of the different things that go on in America. I guess it's like a really big stereotype how we don't know what's going on in the rest of the world. And I always hated that stereotype but I think that's it kind of true, for myself anyways (Interview, Student, Ireland).

This comment seems to demonstrate that she has moved towards the more mature level of intrapersonal development because of her openness to challenge how she previously saw herself as an American.

Similarly to the ease other students had interacting with non-Americans, Brad also did not find it difficult to interact with the international and local students while living in Germany. He also commented on how he did quite a bit of traveling domestically and internationally with his family when he was younger, so he felt more prepared to go abroad. He commented on how he felt that it was good timing to live in another country:

Maybe it was just the time when I was ready. Cause I'm a [in-state] local so I haven't really lived far away or done too much on my own, so going over there, and I was already not really worried about the cultural differences, so it was just me kind of going away, almost maybe like someone going away for college. They're moving away from their hometown for the first time so I was kind of excited for it, a new experience out on my own trying to deal with everything myself (Interview, Student, Germany).

Brad felt that his time in Germany also helped push him to be open minded, especially considering he was in a program that had very few Americans and living in a country where English was not the native language. When reflecting on his time abroad, he said:

Being over there for four months, being thrown into a whole new world, meeting all these international students, being really away from what I know for the past 20 years of my life here in [location of college] with my friends all in this little corner of the world and really just opening up to so many new cultures and meeting so many new people. I feel, personally, like I learned a lot from being over there” (Interview, Student, Germany).

Brad was one of the few students who spent a fair amount of time with local students, while also interacting with a lot of international students as well. He also made it a point to not spend as much time with the American students. Brad seemed to have reached a more mature level of the interpersonal trajectory by being able to establish relationships with multiple people of other backgrounds. He was clearly on the ethnorelative side of the DMIS scale by the openness he had to for interacting with those of other cultures.

Katie also had a fair amount of international travel experience before studying in Spain, including two school trips to Europe and a trip to China in high school. She had also been an orientation leader for the international students at her home campus, so she had quite a bit of prior cultural experience. This benefited Katie for the location she was studying in:

Being in the Basque region, it was more reserved and they accepted you but they were expecting you to try and speak their language, which I loved. I loved the challenge of that. But they wanted you to accept ‘You're in our country so play by our rules’ and I liked that challenge (Interview, Student, Spain).

Katie fully understood the expectation of speaking her host country's language, and she took that challenge and made the most of her experience by enrolling in a Spanish class and practicing Spanish every day to help immerse her in the culture.

Katie also demonstrated a high intercultural understanding during her time abroad. This may be due to her previous travel experience and the guidance provided by her professor. As stated earlier, she clearly understood the importance of learning Spanish and embracing the culture. There were also elements of the culture that she felt should be embraced around the world, such as taking long breaks during the day to spend time with family and the freedom that teenagers are given at a young age, which she believed led to greater maturity and responsibility. She also said that the advice she would give to students who are going abroad would be:

Take advantage of everything and don't judge. Don't try and be like, 'Well I did this back at home.' Just accept it, go with the flow, and open your mind and you'll have more fun because if you're trying to bring what you have at home into a different culture, it's not going to work. If you don't accept change, you're not going to have a good time because nothing is the same around the world (Interview, Student, Spain).

Katie was one of the students who demonstrated a higher level of adaptation and integration on the DMIS scale. She clearly had a more mature level of cognitive and intrapersonal development because of how she engaged with the culture while she was in Spain.

While Katie had quite a bit of international and intercultural experiences before going to Spain, James, who also studied abroad in Spain with the cultural mentor, had lived with international students before, but he didn't really understand diversity and cultural differences until he started living in Spain and working with his cultural mentor:

Long Island [where James is from] is diverse but diversity is not really talked about. But talking about it here was definitely where I got to realize how important different cultures are and how it impacts every aspect of life, like, business, family, like everything (Interview, Student, Spain).

While James is from a diverse area, he recognized that it didn't mean he had a clear idea of what the values and customs are of other cultures.

James was able to make great strides in intercultural competency development during his time abroad, most likely due to his cultural mentor, Pedro. When James first arrived in Spain, he was frustrated and confused by the laid back mentality. He didn't like that the stores would close in the middle of the day and he was confused as to why families would be eating dinner out with their young children so late at night. However, James mentality began to shift during his time abroad. In regards to the children up late at night, he said, "Like families will be up eating dinner at midnight and it's just like 'Why are your children here?' but it's just like who they are, like that's what they do" (Interview, Student, Spain). He also said in regards to the slower paced atmosphere:

What's important is what is important, like their family, their home situation. They just do their own thing, so we [James and his friends he went abroad with] do it here now. We just take the time to chill and have coffee and not think about your project next week and just talk. And that's what they were constantly doing, just stopping to drink coffee and talk. It's definitely something we brought back (Interview, Student, Spain).

James seems to have demonstrated a shift from a more ethnocentric mentality to an ethnorelativism mentality by his desire to embrace the Spanish culture and incorporate into his own culture.

Besides Jack, Laura, who studied in France and took the Cultural Diversity class, had one of the most unique, cultural backgrounds in the sense that she moved from Nigeria to Vermont when she was eight years old. She said:

Where I grew up in Vermont, there was not a lot of diversity. It was a predominately white school. I think it was me and my siblings were the only blacks in our school, so I didn't really get much interaction with people from other cultures. . . . I feel like maybe it's because of my previous experience, like I'm not originally from the US, I'm from a different country so coming to a very diverse place, like I didn't have to adjust, it was more second nature. (Interview, Student, France).

Laura said she never had a problem interacting with the other international students, and she loved the challenge of speaking French with the French students. She recognized the importance of speaking the local language and taking the time to learn about French culture.

Laura clearly demonstrated a high level of intercultural competency while in France, but it seems she went into France with an already high level due to her experience of growing up in Nigeria and then moving to a predominately white state when she was eight. Laura's experience in her Cultural Diversity course also greatly helped shape her intercultural understanding abroad. Laura described one statement from her professor in that class:

Our professor used a really good description of being a fish in a bowl that doesn't know it's in water, but when it's out of bowl then it knows 'Oh I was in water before, I'm not anymore.' So that's how culture is. You don't what your culture really is because you're used to it so you don't think it's different from another culture, but when you're out of it then you're shocked like 'Whoa, we act this way?' (Interview, Student, France)

Laura said that she gained a greater understanding of herself as an American by reflecting on what a masculine and work-focused country America really is, an understanding she didn't have before living in France. This statement demonstrates that Laura was at the adaptation/integration level of the DMIS and she clearly had a mature level of intrapersonal and interpersonal development.

Unlike Laura, Veronica, who is primarily interacting with other Americans while in studying in Italy, did not go abroad with very much cultural understanding or experience, and without the appropriate resources, that may have caused her to struggle in intercultural competency gain. She stated that she is from a small town so she not had very much interaction with other cultures. However, her reason for choosing Italy seems to demonstrate the determination she has for wanting to make it a point to immerse herself in the culture:

I didn't really know anything about the culture and I didn't know anything about the language so I was just thought it would really be a good place to go, be completely new, have a totally different cultural experience, learn about that culture, learn a new language (Interview, Student, Italy).

Although Veronica is not taking a language class, her attempt to try and use basic phrases and speak the language a little each day shows demonstrates her self-determination.

Veronica seems to be facing more of a challenge gaining intercultural competency skills primarily because she is interacting with mostly Americans and she isn't taking any type of culture class. When describing some of the cultural aspects of Italians, she said:

They just don't have as much of a care or concern as Americans do. There was a man in the park that was just showering in a fountain, which was unusual. . . And they will just stare at you, and I don't know if they know they're doing it or if that's just like a culture

thing. And like PDA is all over and I think they're just a very touchy, like they don't care. I guess it would come off loving if I were and Italian living here, but to other cultures, like the US, that's not loving. That's offensive (Interview, Student, Italy).

Veronica's response seems to show that she's currently at a more defensive stage in the DMIS by viewing the Italian culture through a more stereotypical and polarizing lens. She also seems to be at a more initial level of development in regards to the cognitive level of the trajectory because she does seem to have a more naïve view of other cultural practices. Again, this could be due to the lack of cultural guidance she has had during her program and the lack of interaction with locals. While Veronica is attempting to learn the language, it seems that a cultural course could have benefited her in making sense of Italian culture.

Similarly to Veronica, Amanda also experienced difficulties in intercultural competency gain during her time in Italy. She did, however, come in with a little bit more cultural knowledge by working with students from different parts of Europe during her summers working in Long Island prior to going to Italy. Like Veronica, she was looking for a completely different cultural experience, having never traveled outside of the United States. Even though she wasn't pushing herself to interact more with the locals in Italy, she decided to push herself drastically outside of her comfort zone by traveling to Morocco with a friend, a trip she had hesitations about:

I mean, when I went to Morocco I was very scared and nervous and when I got there I was like 'Why I was ever nervous?' It's just the media that makes you feel that way.

That's what also made me realize a lot of things, is that the media has such a pull on the way people see other cultures. It was definitely an eye-opener to see how other people really live (Interview, Student, Italy).

With the help of her tour leader in Morocco, Amanda's mindset on Muslim culture shifted and she enjoyed the religious aspect that she often encountered. Amanda's ability to travel to a place that made her initially feel uncomfortable, allowed her to have a more cultural, eye opening experience than she was having studying in Italy.

While in Italy, like Veronica, Amanda also lived and interacted primarily with other Americans and did not take a class that specifically focused on Italian culture. As stated previously, Amanda had a hard time making sense of gender roles during her in time in Italy, which was only exacerbated by the lack of guidance from the faculty members. At one point Amanda said:

Women are definitely treated very differently in Europe from the US. Women are very powerful in the US and it's taken a while to get where they are now. But I just felt like women there were not treated the way they should be. . . And I just felt the way men looked at women was wrong (Interview, Student, Italy).

This comment shows that Amanda may have been much more in the defensive stage by viewing the Italian culture as inferior to that of the United States. She was also much more in the initial level of cognitive development simply because she didn't have a full understanding of the cultural values. However, as stated earlier, Amanda's trip to Morocco seemed to shift her to a more intermediate level of cognitive understanding because she began to develop more of an awareness and understanding of cultural practices.

Overall, this study demonstrates that many of the students seemed to reach a mid to high level of intercultural competency gain when comparing their statements to the DMIS scale and the cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal trajectories. Program design and student development seem to have played larger role in this intercultural competency gain. If a student

went abroad with less international experience and cultural knowledge, they sometimes seemed to have needed more guidance from on-site faculty members or resources in place to encourage them to interact with international or local students.

Discussion

This study brought forth the number of factors to consider when evaluating how a student gains intercultural competency skills on study abroad programs. While Watson, Siska and Wolfel (2013) as well as Marx and Moss (2011) and Vande Berg (2009) point to a cultural mentor as being the key factor in helping students gain intercultural skills through guided reflection, the students' interviews also show that cultural classes and interactions with local and international students play a large role as well. It is also important to not only look at the program elements, but also where the student is at developmentally and what kind of past intercultural experiences they have had. The student's current development can play a large role in determining what might be a good program fit for them.

For example, James was able to thrive during his time in Spain because of the guidance from his Program Director. While he had interacted a fair amount with the international students at his home campus, his limited international experience and knowledge of the Spanish language meant that he needed a bit more support. If he didn't have that support, he may not have been able to fully make sense of the culture and his time abroad. However, someone like Brad, who had already traveled a bit internationally before going to Germany and had some knowledge of the German language, may not have needed or wanted continuous guidance. He was able to thrive because of the number of cultural classes he took and the large amount of interaction he had with German and international students. Brad's experience could have been very different though if he lived with other American students and took only classes for his Accounting major.

As Williams (2005) notes, there a number of other elements that can lead to intercultural competence besides just having a cultural mentor.

Again, much of this information ties back to Baxter Magolda's (2009) idea of student development and how much the student should be pushed to thrive interculturally on their program. An English speaking country like Australia may have been the best fit for Tyler and George because they had never been out of the country before and did not interact with the international students at their home campus. However, while they were both able meet international and local students with an open mind, George in particular may have needed more additional reflective guidance, as evidenced by his lack to fully articulate how he felt he was growing and changing during his time abroad.

It is interesting to note that the two students, Amanda and Veronica, who seemed to have gained the least intercultural competency skills are both women who studied in Italy, lived and interacted with primarily Americans and did not take any type of cultural course, besides Amanda who took an Italian language course. American style universities can be appealing to students who are going abroad for the first time as a way to ease them into the culture. However, American style institutions may hinder the student's intercultural development. If the student is studying at an American style institution, it seems that they should be encouraged to at least take a culture class since they may have more limited interaction with the locals. It would be interesting to see how different Amanda and Veronica's experiences would be if they had a cultural mentor like James had in Spain or if they were living and interacting with other international students like Jack, Cindy or Brian. The blame cannot entirely fall on Amanda or Victoria's motivation or development when there are clearly other elements at play.

Overall, many of the students reflected on at least one element that contributed to an increase in intercultural competency gain. While cultural mentors, cultural classes, and interaction with international and local students seemed to be the main components, it can be difficult to find programs that incorporate all three of these elements. However, even if a student is able to partake in a program that encourages at least one or two of these elements, and that student has the motivation to make the most out of their time abroad, they will have a higher chance of gaining intercultural competency skills.

Further research is necessary to explore a student's holistic intercultural competency development from before they go abroad to when they return. This would allow the researcher to fully see how the student is developing at each stage of studying abroad. It would also be best to incorporate observations of how the students behave abroad as well. For this study, I had to take the students at their word and that may not have always reflected the truth of what really happened. However, observations would require a significant amount of time and a number of researchers. Additional work should also be further disaggregated to isolate certain factors, For instance, future studies may also focus just on gender and intercultural competency gain, on one particular country, or even just on the student's living situation. As this research shows, there are number of factors that seem to contribute to intercultural competency gain, and each one could have been expanded upon in its own study.

This study provides valuable information for study abroad offices about what elements they should consider when establishing partnerships abroad or when working with third party programs. Key questions include: Does the partner school or program encourage interaction between local and international students? Are cultural mentors present? What kind of classes will the student have access to? Do any of these classes focus on the host country's culture? It is also

important to assess how much support the in-country staff is providing the student. Is the staff member someone like Pedro, Patrick or Katie's professor who is there to provide guidance and suggestions on how to get immersed in the culture or is it someone like Lisa or Tiffany who lacked in guidance and cultural immersion support? Study abroad advisors, like myself, should also reflect on this information and practice structured advising sessions by assessing where the student is at developmentally and what their needs and motivations are for going abroad. This will allow the advisor and student to work together to find an ideal program fit. In order for most students to achieve intercultural competency development, there needs to be support from the study abroad staff at the beginning of the student's pursuit to study abroad, as well as the in-country program staff and faculty when the student is then partaking in their study abroad experience.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Students Who are Currently Studying Abroad

- Please state your name and age.
- What year are you and where are you currently studying abroad?
- How often did you interact with others of different cultures before going abroad? How much did you know about other cultures before going abroad?
- What is your housing situation like? Who do you interact with on a daily basis?
- Do you often interact with locals in your host country? Why or why not?
- (For students in a non-English speaking country) How often do you speak the country's local language? Are you making an attempt to learn the language? Why or why not?
- How do you try and immerse yourself in your host culture? Do you feel that you have the intercultural competency skills to interact with the host culture?
- What cultural differences have you encountered on your program so far? How have you responded to them?
- Do you feel you were adequately prepared to deal with cultural differences? For example, did the pre-departure session help prepare you for cultural differences and how to handle them? Does your host university help you in understanding cultural differences?
- Do you take any kind of class that teaches the culture of your host country?
- Are you given the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with your host country? If you are, does a faculty member help lead these reflections?
- What do you think are your program's strengths? What are the program's weaknesses?

- How do you hope to change by the end of the program in regards to intercultural competency development?

Students Who Have Recently Studied Abroad

- Please state your name, age, and year.
- What year were you when you studied abroad and where did you study abroad?
- How often did you interact with others of different cultures before going abroad? How much did you know about other cultures before going abroad?
- What was your housing situation like? Who did you interact with on a daily basis?
- Did you often interact with locals in your host country? Why or why not?
- (For students who were in a non-English speaking country) How often did you speak the country's local language? Did you make an attempt to learn the language? Why or why not?
- How did you try and immerse yourself in the culture? Did you feel that you had the intercultural competency skills to interact with the host culture?
- What cultural differences did you encounter on your program? How did you respond to them at the start of the program? How did you respond to those cultural differences by the end of your program?
- Did you feel you were adequately prepared to deal with cultural differences? For example, did the pre-departure session help prepare you for cultural differences and how to handle them? Did your host university help you in understanding cultural differences?
- Did you take any kind of class that taught the culture of your host country?

- Were you given the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with your host country? If you were, did a faculty member help lead those reflections?
- What do you think were your program's strengths? What were the program's weaknesses?
- How did you feel you changed by the end of the program in regards to intercultural competency development?
- What do you wish you did differently on your program? What advice would you give to students who are studying abroad now?

Study Abroad Staff Members

- What are your goals and objectives for the study abroad programs? What do you hope students will learn?
- Does the partner university provide any kind of cultural information for the students before they go abroad? Does [name of college] provide this information?
- How do you help prepare students for intercultural understanding before they go abroad and when they come back from their program?
- Do you know if the students have any kind of coursework when they're abroad that focuses on study of the host country's culture?
- Do any of the programs provide a type of cultural mentor that helps the students reflect on their experiences abroad? If they do, how often does the cultural mentor work with the student and what kind of support do they provide?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge that is preventing students from gaining intercultural competency while they're abroad?

- What do you think the programs do well in terms of helping the students gain intercultural competency? What could they do a better job of?
- How do you assess intercultural competency gain? Do you provide any surveys when the students come back to evaluate their intercultural learning?

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Title of the Study: In Pursuit of Intercultural Competency During Study Abroad

Researcher Name: Leslie Johnson

My name is Leslie Johnson, and I am a student with the SIT International Education program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for partial fulfillment of my MA in International Education. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how undergraduate students may achieve intercultural competency from their study abroad experience, while also finding out from study abroad staff members what can be done to improve intercultural competency gain on study abroad programs.

Study Procedures

Your participation will consist of one interview lasting less than 60 minutes. For students who are currently studying abroad, this interview will take place over Skype. For students who recently studied abroad and study abroad faculty, the interview will be held in person and in an office. The interview will be recorded on a password-protected device. If you do not wish to be recorded, please let me know because this means you will not be able to participate in the research.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview, you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

Potential Benefits to Participants and/or to Society

Your information will greatly help our study abroad office in determining what we can do to make intercultural competency more achievable on our study abroad programs.

Confidentiality

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. I will record the interview on a password-protected device. Transcriptions of the interviews will be stored on my password-protected computer. The interviews will be deleted after the completion of the capstone, and the transcriptions will remain on my computer with the names of participants redacted. Neither your name nor [name of college] will be included in my capstone paper or presentation. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, and I will use

descriptive phrases, such as “small, state college” in place of [name of college] I may use this information for future publication where your information will continue to remain confidential, as stated above.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

Participant’s signature _____ Date:

Researcher’s signature _____ Date:

Consent to Quote from Interview

I may wish to quote from the interview with you either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.

Do I have your permission to use direct quotes in my paper?

_____Yes

_____No

Consent to Audio-Record Interview

Do I have your permission to record our interview?

_____Yes

_____No

Researcher’s Contact Information

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at leslie.johnson@mail.sit.edu or my advisor at karla.sarr@sit.edu

Rights of Research Participant-IRB Contact Information

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

School for International Training Institutional Review Board 1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676
Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA irb@sit.edu

802-258-3132

Appendix C: Sample of Interview Themes

Table 1: Students

Topic	Number of Sources
American Culture	3
American Politics	2
American Students	5
Classes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture Class • Field Trips • Group Projects 	9 4 2
Exposure to Other Cultures Pre-Study Abroad	5
Host Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to Immerse • Desire to be More Immersed • Culture Shock • Discussions in Classes • Family Connection 	8 2 11 7 1
Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Roommates 	3
Interaction with International Students Abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook Group Chats • Friend Group • International Students' Home Countries • Learning About Their Culture • Sports 	3 5 4 2 2
Interaction with International Students at Plattsburgh	8

Topic Cont.	Number of Sources Cont.
Interaction with Locals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes • Desire to Meet More Locals • Faculty Member Assistance • Non-Students 	 3 5 1 2
Intercultural Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptability • Adjustment • Confidence • Desire to Learn About Cultures • Desire to Interact with Other Cultures • Independence • Knowledge About Other Cultures • Open Mindedness • Organization • Positive Outlook 	 2 1 2 3 3 4 3 7 1 1
Language Class	5
On-Campus Orientation	5
Pre-Departure	11
Plattsburgh Reflection Specific Course	7
Professor Guidance	2
Program Coordinator Guidance	3
Reflection	8
Travel Before Going Abroad	6

Table 2: Study Abroad Staff

Topic	Number of Sources
Culture Course	2
Establishing Partnerships	1
Evaluation-Surveys	2
Student Study Abroad Research	1
Financial Aid	1
Global Education Mentors	2
Goals for Study Abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting with Academics • Career Goals • Exposure to Other Cultures • Independence/Self-Reliance 	2 2 2 1
In-Country Orientation	2
Interaction Between Domestic and Study Abroad Students	2
Challenges for Gaining Intercultural Competency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Lack of Buy-In • Level of Student Development • Motivation • Structure of Program 	1 1 1 2 2
Online Learning Content	1
Re-Entry	2