

Spring 5-22-2017

Did You Get the Message?: Influence of Study Abroad Marketing to Prospective Students in Maryville College Study Abroad Demographics

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Did You Get the Message?:

Influence of Study Abroad Marketing to Prospective Students in Maryville College Study

Abroad Demographics

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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.

May 22, 2017

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Abstract

Despite the increased institutional marketing and outreach to students on study abroad benefits and the visibility of successful returned students, long-term and short-term study abroad program interest has not grown past 25% of each graduating class at Maryville College – a small, liberal arts institution in Maryville, Tennessee. To better understand how early exposure to study abroad information may influence students' decisions to go abroad at Maryville College, I examined college promotional materials, admissions staff practices and study abroad perceptions, as well as students' memories of study abroad marketing during their prospective phase and their decision-making process. The findings suggest four main barriers to study abroad at Maryville College, which include a lack of diversity and inclusion in marketing, little understanding of academic relevance of study abroad and the study abroad financial structure, along with over-emphasizing the international community at Maryville College.

Introduction

In today's globally-minded world and job market, it is necessary for college graduates to have an international experience while attending a higher education institution (National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 2015; Posey, 2003; Wilson-Oyelaran, 2011). Several reports show that students who study abroad develop critical career competencies, a better understanding of vocation, along with an introduction to crucial cognitive, social and personal skills needed for the current work force (Tillman, 2005). These skills do not go unnoticed by employers. As the QS Global Employer survey¹ demonstrates, 60% of employers value an international experience in applicants (Molony, Sowter, & Potts, 2011).

Studies have shown intentional international experiences positively impact student outcomes, such as increased student employability after college graduation and improved acceptance rates into graduate programs (Molony, Sowter, & Potts, 2011; NACE, 2015; Tillman, 2005). Maryville College – the focus of this study – identifies itself as a liberal arts school that is concerned with student employability, which resulted in the creation of Maryville College Works, an institution-wide program that “integrates today’s job market with a time-tested, small-college liberal arts education” (Maryville College, 2016). With career-integrated curriculum and career-focused goals, the college should encourage more students to study abroad. Therefore, the Center for International Education (CIE) has increased institutional marketing to enhance career integration of study abroad and educate students, faculty, and staff on the importance and relevance of study abroad in today’s society.

Despite increased effort from Maryville College’s CIE and International Programming Committee (IPC) to increase awareness of essential study abroad outcomes, such as improved

¹ The 2011 QS Global Employer survey retrieved data from over 10,000 employers in 116 countries.

student employability, study abroad numbers have stayed consistently around 25% for each graduating class, showing no significant growth within the study abroad program (Maryville College CIE, 2016). In addition to career-related marketing, the CIE has increased marketing to combat common misconceptions that may create barriers for students, such as peer outreach, print materials and presentations that address study abroad affordability and time restrictions. For example, CIE staff and student ambassadors acknowledge the misconception of study abroad program's high fees by explaining Maryville College's exchange model for semester programs, short-term program all-inclusive pricing, and the scholarship funds reserved specifically for Maryville College study abroad students.

Additionally, the CIE has increased marketing to underrepresented groups in study abroad to support more diversity among study abroad students. However, there remains a lack of diversity among degree areas studying abroad and racial and ethnic diversity in Maryville College study abroad students. Although Maryville College does not collect racial data on their study abroad students, the IPC and the Director of CIE have shared anecdotal evidence of the racial breakdown of study abroad students. Minority students and first-generation students are not representative of the Maryville College student population. Following national trends, the college has made small advancements in increasing minority representation in study abroad; however, there is still room to improve student representation.

To improve campus awareness and study abroad participation, marketing strategies are multifaceted, trying to reach students in as many places as possible with as much relevant information as possible. Notwithstanding the increased institutional marketing and outreach to students on study abroad benefits and visibility of successful returned students, long-term study abroad and short-term program interest has not grown past 25% of each graduating class. While

analyzing student participation trends and the marketing that students receive while on-campus is an important practice, it does not account for all areas of marketing and outreach to Maryville College students. Therefore, I explored the marketing of study abroad to prospective Maryville College students to determine how the messaging and information that prospective students receive may influence students' decisions to study abroad or not while attending Maryville College. To understand the entire scope of study abroad marketing to prospective Maryville College students, this qualitative study focused on the representation of study abroad in both print and virtual materials, admissions staff's presentation of study abroad to prospective students, and current Maryville College students' memory of study abroad marketing during their prospective student phase.

Maryville College and Study Abroad

Maryville College History and Mission

Maryville College is a nationally-ranked, private, liberal arts college in Maryville, Tennessee. It was founded in 1819 by Rev. Isaac Anderson as a religious training college and is the 12th oldest institution in the South. It remains affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, but welcomes students of all faiths. Maryville College markets itself as an academically rigorous and highly personal experience for its students. It highlights the liberal arts education that students receive, while also offering a professional preparation curriculum. The school has about 1,200 students and has a student to faculty ratio of 13 to one.

Maryville College's mission is to "prepare students for lives of citizenship and leadership as we challenge each one to search for truth, grow in wisdom, work for justice and dedicate a life of creativity and service to the peoples of the world" (Maryville College, 2016). Maryville

College achieves its mission through multiple avenues, including, but not limited to, the various academic departments, the Center for Community Engagement, the Maryville College Career Center, Mountain Challenge, and the CIE. These departments combined have many programs to help enrich student learning beyond the traditional classroom and to create an experiential learning element in their higher education.

Although Maryville College encourages learning beyond the classroom, the college academics are center stage for students. The college's curriculum is "grounded in the liberal arts and sciences," and is customized by faculty to best fit the student body (Maryville College, 2016). The college has nine divisions of study, each of which focuses on at least four paradigms, or degree areas. The college's five top degree areas include business – 6% of student body, finance/accounting – 5.4% of student body, exercise science – 5.3% of student body, biology – 4.8% of student body, and education – 3.4% of student body (D. Cantrell, Personal communication, October 25, 2016). These numbers demonstrate that the college has an academically diverse student population.

In addition to academic diversity, ethnic and racial diversity at Maryville College is higher compared to other area higher education institutions. Although Maryville College is not as diverse as the general state population, surveys from the college report that nearly 25% of the student body identifies as non-White. This is much higher than surveys from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville campus, where about 15.5% of the student body identifies as non-White. Maryville Colleges is dedicated to recruiting students from diverse backgrounds and identities, which has increased representation of first-generation students and students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. While first-generation and Pell-grant recipients are well represented on

campus, there is still significant area for growth and representation of the minority students of the Tennessee population (to see exact percentages, please see *appendix A*).

Although domestic diversity is prioritized, the College has made progress in internationalizing its campus and exposing its students to diverse cultures. The primary internationalization method is hosting international and exchange students on campus. Each year, the College strives to have at least three percent of the student body of degree-seeking international and exchange students from over 40 countries. Maryville College would like to increase their international population to 10% of the total student population. This would allow Maryville College to experience added international diversity and understand further the values and practices of individuals from around the globe.

Study Abroad Program Offerings at Maryville College

True to their mission, Maryville College encourages students to think beyond the boundaries of their home campus and experience classrooms around the world. The College has multiple study abroad models providing a variety of different formats for students to have an international experience. Students have several opportunities to go abroad for a full year, semester, summer semester and/or January-term. To offer students affordable, quality programs abroad, the CIE has nurtured relationships with multiple third-party providers and international institutions.

To further the Maryville College mission, the CIE fosters strategic partnerships both domestically and internationally. The CIE partners with International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP) for most of its academic year and semester study abroad options. Beyond ISEP, Maryville has exclusive bilateral partnerships with several universities around the world. This

university network allows students the opportunity to choose to study in over 50 countries and 180 institutions.

With the contracts with ISEP and all bilateral partner universities, Maryville College students can study at a foreign institution and receive room and board for the same tuition they pay at Maryville College. Students' merit scholarships and federal and state aid transfer with them to the foreign institutions, as long as it is an exchange program. This allows every student the opportunity to study abroad without having to worry about significant added costs. In addition to regular tuition payments, students who study abroad for an academic year or semester are responsible for their airfare costs, visa, passport and normal personal expenses while abroad.

In addition to semester study, students may study abroad during the summer semester. During summer, exchange programs are not available to students due to the structure of Maryville College's schedule. However, students have a chance in participating in study abroad programs through ISEP, as well as provider programs from CEA Study Abroad, CIS Abroad and ISA. These programs are typically of a similar structure as semester programs, with students studying at a university or at a provider campus.

To help students gain professional experience while abroad, Maryville College has also started marketing internship and service-learning programs abroad. Internship or service-learning abroad gives students an opportunity to develop professional skills in an environment that may not be accessible within the United States. Maryville College's three main internship providers have services that match students with departments, companies, and institutions abroad that would not be open for career shadowing in the United States.

The CIE strives to have as many students as possible on long-term study abroad, but understands that the model does not work for every student. Therefore, the school develops its

own faculty-led, short-term Travel-Study programs. Faculty develop these experiential excursions based on student interests and popular demand. Travel Study programs are typically two to three weeks in length and occur during the January-term. Occasionally these trips are shorter and take place during Spring break or in May.

Academic Incentives of Study Abroad

Beyond gaining an international experience and personal growth, there are many academic incentives to study abroad at Maryville College. Studying abroad can potentially fulfill a few necessary parts of each student's education at the college, such as paradigm requirement, core curriculum course, and *significant practical experience* (SPE) fulfillment.

Maryville College has rigorous degree requirements for all students, including a semester study abroad for certain paradigms. At the College, a paradigm is a student's academic path, such as International Business, Engineering, or Biology. For certain paradigms and minors, students are required to study abroad to complement their Maryville College studies. Study abroad is an integral part for most language majors. For example, the Spanish department values study abroad experiences as an excellent extension of the Maryville curriculum and allows students to gain a deeper understanding of a Spanish-speaking culture. Other departments that share this academic policy include International Business, International Studies, and many language departments.

Many departments do not explicitly require students to study abroad; however, many professors and staff are united in trying to increase international experiences among Maryville College students no matter their degree path. The Maryville College Career Center acts as a major partner in encouraging students to study abroad. Career advisors encourage students to seek experience abroad, especially if students' career aspirations include any aspect of international or intercultural understanding. Faculty from the Psychology departments and

various STEM departments are committed to encouraging students to gain an international experience. Each year, Maryville College faculty plan at least one science based Travel-Study program to a popular location.

Some Travel-Study programs and most long-term programs enable students to qualify to fulfill part of the Core Curriculum at Maryville College. Foundation and language courses along with 10 other separate domains make up the core curriculum (Maryville College, 2016). Going abroad can fulfill up to two of these core classes: the language requirement and the Cultural and Intercultural Dynamics. To fulfill the language requirement, students would choose a program abroad that enables them to receive at least 8 credits of a second language. Beyond the second language requirement, some Travel-Study and semester programs qualify for the Cultural and Intercultural Dynamics Core. Students must opt to use study abroad for this requirement and fulfill it by reflecting on their experience interacting with another culture.

Beyond fulfilling degree and core requirements, students can utilize study abroad as their *significant practical experience* (SPE). The SPE is a pillar of the Maryville College Works initiative, which is a roadmap for students to follow while preparing for post-college life. This program was launched to attract students who are looking for a career path to understand the value of a liberal arts education. Furthermore, it gives structure to students' education that encourages professional development and competency development from the beginning of their college career.

The SPE can be an element of a student's education that can be nerve-racking, as it may be added work to their typical schedule. For students, incorporating their SPE into their study abroad experience will reduce their workload and encourage students to enter study abroad with set goals and objectives for their time abroad. Although many students may not initially see the

value of creating goals and objectives for their time abroad, they will certainly understand that benefit of combining the two experiences. As an increasing number of students successfully complete their SPE through study abroad, the CIE hopes that students will share their experience with their peers. Peer-to-peer advertising is one of the best ways to increase study abroad numbers at Maryville College.

Institutional Marketing Practices for Study Abroad

The CIE has a multi-pronged marketing plan to attract students to study abroad. Although the college has a small population, reaching students in an effective manner can be a challenging task. In order to reach as many students as possible, the CIE utilizes print and electronic platforms, classroom and campus outreach, and peer marketing strategies.

Bulletin boards and flyers throughout campus are a good way to initiate contact with students; however, more precise and program specific information can be passed through electronic platforms. Each weekday, students receive a campus newsletter, Today@MC, that provides them with the daily news from around campus. Targeted study abroad campaigns are posted to Today@MC to give students program specific information and websites for them to continue reading. For example, when new Travel-Study programs are published for the following year, program specifics are posted on Today@MC to ensure that the most accurate information is available.

Beyond these marketing measures, the CIE recognizes that often the most influential piece in getting students to consider going abroad may be peer support and encouragement. Especially when trying to recruit students who are not typically represented in study abroad, peer support and recruitment is an essential step in changing the overall picture of who is studying abroad (Herrin, 2007; Sweeney, 2013). In the last year, the CIE has brought together returned study abroad students and trained them to be integral parts of our marketing and outreach

strategies for Maryville College. This group, known as the Study Abroad Ambassadors, is made up of two student co-leaders and other returned students who are interested in increasing study abroad participation at Maryville College. Study Abroad Ambassadors do many outreach events, such as tabling in common areas and sharing their stories during outreach events. Sharing their experiences in this way shows prospective study abroad students that it's also possible for them to have a meaningful and impactful international experience.

Beyond being a visible presence on campus and appealing to different audiences of students, Study Abroad Ambassadors create and distribute new marketing materials. Study Abroad Ambassadors brainstorm new materials and resources that may encourage students to study abroad, and collaborate with the CIE to create relevant materials. These materials are sent out through our email interest list to students who have already shown some interest in study abroad. To reach and encourage new populations of students, materials are printed and strategically hung throughout campus. This type of marketing aims to target a diverse student population and influence the population of students seeking an international experience.

Students Studying Abroad

Despite these outreach and marketing initiatives, study abroad at Maryville College is not representative of the student population as a whole. Many Maryville College degree areas have a structure set in place to allow students to study abroad for a short-term or long-term study abroad experience. According to the Institute for International Education's (IIE) Open Doors report (2015), business majors and biology (STEM) majors are the top two degree areas represented in study abroad, accounting for 42.2% of students going abroad (IIE, 2015). Other highly represented degree areas include the humanities, languages, and fine arts (IIE, 2015). Although Maryville College has strong humanities and fine arts programs, these areas are nearly unrepresented in semester study abroad programs. Short-term programs have high participation

of behavioral science and STEM students, but still have limited participation of humanities and fine arts students (Maryville College CIE, 2016).

Maryville College Admissions Practices

To better understand how study abroad is marketed to prospective Maryville College students, it is important to understand how Maryville College Admissions markets the college as a whole to prospective students. The Maryville College Admissions Office has created a comprehensive guide to the college online. The Admissions website is easily accessible to all students who have internet access. Prospective students and potential campus visitors can easily navigate the website, as it has clearly marked tabs and locations. This section of the Maryville College website does not directly acknowledge institutional academics, campus life, or other opportunities. However, within this section of the website, the office has included an electronic version of their campus view book.

With a solid foundation in print and electronic materials to attract students to campus, the Maryville College Admissions Office uses in-person outreach events to show the true college spirit to prospective students. Prospective students and their families can make appointments with admissions counselors and arrange tours any day of the week, making campus and staff very accessible to all students. But if students wish to have more than a campus tour and one-on-one session with a counselor, they may sign up for a Saturday Visit Day or Meet Maryville event.

Specialized campus events for prospective students are a time for those students to meet current students and have a more comprehensive understanding of the college's environment. Saturday Visits occur most Saturdays during the Fall and Spring semesters and include an information session with an Admissions Counselor, a guided tour of campus with a Maryville College Ambassador, followed by a question and answer session. This visit structure allows

students and their families to have a more inclusive experience. Information received may be more rounded with a larger group of individuals asking questions. Students may hear answers to questions and topics that were not of initial concern to them. Saturday Visits are a great way for prospective students to get a first impression of Maryville, but the most inclusive experience for prospective students is the Meet Maryville events. Meet Maryville is an all-day event that takes place three times per year, twice in the Fall semester and once in the Spring. During Meet Maryville events, students are exposed to the same elements as Saturday Visits, but can speak to faculty and learn about other opportunities at a departmental reception.

Literature Review

Internationalization Efforts at Maryville College

As globalization continues to be a factor that affects educational institutions and their goals, higher education institutions around the United States are creating initiatives to further internationalize campuses (Brustein, 2009). According to Brustein (2009), internationalization is an effort that must be undertaken by the entire campus. Indeed, the foundation of internationalization is integration of departments and programs (Brustein, 2009). Upon this foundation, Brustein (2009) builds an elaborate framework for comprehensive internationalization through 12 pillars. The 12 pillars include (1) internationalizing the institutional strategic plan, (2) internationalizing curriculum, (3) eliminating barriers to study abroad, (4) requiring language proficiency, (5) creating international relationships, (6) internationalizing faculty searches, (7) incorporating international contribution into faculty reward system, (8) upgrading senior international officers reporting relationships, (9) placing senior international officers on committees and councils, (10) eliminating barriers to international student recruitment and retention, (11) drawing expertise and experiences from immigrant communities, and (12) making global relationships an institutional priority (Brustein,

2009). Many parts of the Maryville College community understand the importance of internationalizing its small campus, and has committed to six of the 12 internationalization pillars over their history.

To implement campus internationalization, Maryville College supports an active International Programming Committee (IPC) and founded the CIE roughly ten years ago. Together the IPC and CIE promote internationalization on campus, trying to bring departments together for conversations on internationalization and the value it adds to the college. The IPC promotes an internationalized curriculum and works closely with the Academic Dean and academic planning committee to ensure that all students have exposure to intercultural learning and environments. With the support of the CIE, the IPC has cultivated a more culturally and internationally diverse faculty and a core curriculum that requires intercultural competency training. In addition to the Cultural and Intercultural Core requirements, students must complete eight credits of language study before graduation.

The college has been successful in many areas of internationalization, specifically emphasizing increasing study abroad opportunities for all students. The CIE has nurtured several relationships with foreign institutions and brokered deals for student exchange programs with those institutions. IPC and CIE dedication to increasing partnerships with third-party providers and encouraging faculty-led program development has alleviated some common study abroad barriers related to academic, timing, and financial barriers. Moreover, the CIE has addressed study abroad barriers such as programs affordability, increased program options, and scholarships through intensive marketing and outreach programs that were outlined in the section above. This indicates that the college has not addressed all study abroad barriers, which I will discuss later in the literature review.

Although the CIE and IPC have succeeded in some internationalization efforts throughout campus, many of the pillars that Brustein (2009) presents still go unnoticed and are not understood by the college as a whole. Many departments within the Maryville College community do not acknowledge the benefits of internationalization or the necessity of the process. More specific to this study, many departments do not understand the benefits study abroad brings to the overall college community. These benefits will be more thoroughly explored in the next section.

Benefits of Study Abroad

Given the college's mission and drive to have students better understand global affairs, the CIE and IPC have prioritized study abroad participation as a necessary complement to the college's programs. A strong international program may help build a more prominent profile for the college and may result in Maryville College being ranked higher on some education lists. For example, the U.S. News and World Report considers student retention and graduation when ranking higher education institutions, which can be directly impacted by the study abroad experience (Morse, Brooks, & Mason, 2016).

When examining the influence of study abroad on returned students, a University of California – San Diego study found that international experiences may help increase retention rates among first generation students (UC San Diego, 2009). This seven-year study found that eight percent more first generation students graduated in four years, 20% more in five years and 20% more in six years, compared to first generation students who did not study abroad (UC San Diego, 2009). Other studies, such as the study from Posey (2003), support findings of higher graduation rates among study abroad students than those of non-participants. This study abroad benefit could help Maryville College achieve a higher national ranking and also create a more welcoming campus environment.

When examining study abroad and its effect on the college environment, Gonyea (2008) suggests that returned study abroad students tend to be involved in more reflective and integrative learning experiences. Furthermore, returned students typically exhibit improved intercultural competency and international awareness (Anderson, Lawton, Texeisen, & Hubbard, 2005; Black & Duhon, 2006; Carlson, 1990; Freed, 1995; Lewin, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007, Savicki, 2008; Williams, 2005). These are the skills and competencies that, when practiced in a college environment, do not only benefit the returned study abroad student, but the general student population as well. Currently, returned study abroad students at Maryville College are active in many college organizations and clubs that promote social justice and awareness building throughout the campus. These events and campaigns allow other students to experience a new perspective without leaving campus.

In addition to positively affecting first-generation student retention and campus environment, studies have shown that intentional international experiences can increase student employability (NACE, 2015). Wilson-Oyelaran (2011) argues that students solidify career-goals while abroad and develop critical career competencies, strongly suggesting that study abroad is an essential part of the college experience. The NACE study from 2015 demonstrates that almost twice as many college graduates who studied abroad are employed, compared to graduates who have not studied abroad (NACE, 2015). Likewise, graduates with study abroad experience are more likely to be accepted into their first and second choice graduate programs (NACE, 2015). As Maryville College focuses more on institutional outcomes, the CIE has capitalized and increased career specific marketing strategies, hoping to educate students, faculty, and staff on the importance and relevance of study abroad in today's society for all students.

Historical and Current Study Abroad Representation

Traditionally, study abroad caters to a very homogenous group of students, typically white, middle- to upper-class women (Comp, 2007; Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator, 2009). During the 2014/15 academic year, 72.9% of study abroad students were white, and 66.6% of students were female (IIE, 2015). In recent years, diversity of American students going abroad increased, but the numbers are still not representative of the general U.S. university student population (Sweeney, 2013). For example, in 2010, Black students made up 14.5% and Latino/a students comprised 13% of enrolled students at U.S. higher educational institutions. However, these groups represented only 4.8% and 6.9% respectively of study abroad students (Sweeney, 2013).

Individual Barriers to Study Abroad

Students from underrepresented populations are slowly starting to participate in study abroad, but not at the same rate as they are attending university. Specifically, at Maryville College, diversity among study abroad students is lacking. In order to better understand this phenomenon, individual circumstances and existing barriers must be considered for each student while marketing and advising students on study abroad (Herrin, 2007). Different groups of students have reported common reasons for poor study abroad participation such as lack of family support, lack of financial means, awareness, and little to no faculty and institutional support (Carter, 1991; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013).

On an individual level, minority and first-generation students must navigate the study abroad process alone (Comp, 2007; Ganz, 2007). With parents who may not have attended college, chances of having a family member who has participated in an international experience is very slight. Dealing with the application process, site selection, and funding, students may feel alone and lost in the process (Comp, 2007). Even if students do reach out to their family for

support, often families with little knowledge or awareness of the study abroad process are wary of their child going abroad. Potential study abroad families may fear for their child's safety while abroad, as they may not fully understand the complex safety structures most study abroad programs have in place (Sweeney, 2013). Furthermore, family members may not understand the academic value of a study abroad program and may worry that their child will delay their academic career (Robinson, 2007; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013).

In addition to the lack of familial support, another individual circumstance that many students struggle with is limited financial means (Robinson, 2007; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013). Potential study abroad students may be shocked by the initial study abroad program fee and may not seek out additional information on funding for an international program (Sweeney, 2013). Ganz (2006) and Greenbaum (2012) have concluded that if information on study abroad scholarships is widely distributed, it may influence students to study abroad even if they had not considered it before. On the contrary, if information is not dispersed throughout college campuses, the information does not influence the decision-making process for many underrepresented students (Greenbaum, 2012).

Institutional Barriers to Study Abroad

While individual circumstances contribute significantly to a students' decision to study abroad, students' access to information remains a barrier created by the higher education institution. If higher education institutions do not examine their processes of disseminating information, they will not reach underrepresented groups with critical information for the decision-making process (Robinson, 2007). Building awareness of funding and study abroad early in life could increase disadvantaged population's participation in study abroad (Robinson, 2007). Although Robinson (2007) speaks towards early international exposure during elementary and/or middle school, early institutional exposure to specific study abroad programs, funding and

academic opportunities may also increase disadvantaged population participation (Carter, 1991; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013).

Early exposure may not only be beneficial for students, but may also influence family support for students seeking an experience abroad (Brux & Fry, 2010). Moreover, as the student population becomes more diverse and includes more first-generation students, international education professionals need to work to disseminate information to these students and their familial support network (Mazon, 2010). Mazon (2010) proposes that timing is also critical; students with a better understanding of their academic and professional goals may be more receptive to specific information. If they hear information at multiple stages of their college career, the likelihood of information being shared with family is also higher (Lu, Reddick, Dean, & Pecero, 2015; Sweeney, 2013).

Although international education professionals play a critical role in informing students about study abroad experience, the entire institution must make a promise to take internationalization and study abroad seriously (Malone, 2007; Mazon, 2010; Sweeney, 2013). If faculty and college staff work together with international education professionals, more students receive relevant information that may influence their decision (Carter, 1991; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013). Staff and faculty's diversity reflecting the identities of the student body can also encourage underrepresented groups of students to study abroad (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005). When considering early exposure to international experiences, it is especially important to recognize the diversity of the recruiting and admissions staff (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005).

Beyond creating a representative staff and faculty community, the recruiting and admissions staff should focus on recruiting all types of students to campus and encourage an

inclusive campus environment (Carter, 1991; Malone, 2007). Creating a campus that encourages true inclusivity among all students is a prime way to encourage diversity among study abroad students (Carter, 1991; Sweeney, 2013). If students feel comfortable within their home institution, it is less likely they will fret overseas about feeling discriminated against or uncomfortable (Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013).

Building on the existing literature, this study attempts to shed light on how early exposure to study abroad information at Maryville College may influence a student's decision to study abroad while enrolled at the college, which will be discussed next.

Design & Methodology

Methodology Choice and Rationale

To better understand how marketing of study abroad to prospective Maryville College students may influence the demographics of study abroad, I used qualitative methodology to examine the messaging and information that prospective students receive. I explored study abroad marketing practices to prospective students through an ethnomethodology lens using the Maryville College community as a micro-community that may reflect the practices of this small community and other similarly-sized private, liberal arts colleges (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 26). To further examine these marketing practices used with prospective students, I employed content analysis and in-depth individual interview methods.

Site and Participant Description and Sampling

All data collection took place at Maryville College, in Maryville, Tennessee. Maryville College is located on the western foothills of the Smoky Mountains, where many of our students were born and raised from families that have been in the region for generations. With such a strong emphasis on being local, many students do not pay significant attention to "international people and ideas, making it that much more challenging to articulate the value of international

experiences and cross-cultural understanding” (Smith, 2016, p. 3). The college educates roughly 1,400 students each year, many of whom are from the area.

Print and virtual materials may be the only experience that some prospective students have with Maryville College before they enroll as full-time students. To fully examine marketing of study abroad to prospective students, I analyzed print and virtual materials. I used a purposive sampling strategy (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) for these materials, as there are only select materials put out by the college that fit the purpose of this study.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with Admissions staff members to comprehend what messaging about study abroad goes out to students. Although this staff population is not the only population responsible for recruitment, they are the population that develops materials and coordinates most of the outreach. Therefore, I used purposive sampling (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) to select Admissions staff participants. Also, it needs to be noted that there were a limited number of Admissions staff and I interviewed at peak recruitment time, which further limited who was available to speak with me.

Interviewing Admissions staff and counselors served to understand the process of marketing study abroad to prospective Maryville College students. To better understand how students perceive and meet the outreach efforts, I sought current students’ perspectives on it. I collected data through semi-structured individual interviews with students, focusing on fourth-year Maryville College students, more specifically students who had and had not studied abroad. To select the student population, I used a stratified sample for matriculating students (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). I first stratified based on who had and who had not studied abroad. Within those subgroups, I tried to stratify the sample by racial, socioeconomic, athletic participation, and field of study categories. I then reached out to specific students that fit within

these parameters. More specifically, I reached out to five study abroad students, all of whom accepted the invitation. I reached out to 12 non-study broad students that fit the populations needed and were suggested for the study by students I knew. Six students agreed to participate and I chose five that represented the college population best.

Methods of Data Collection

Content Analysis

Due to the nature of marketing, messaging and value of study abroad is not always communicated through in-person communication, but rather through the standard marketing materials that the Maryville College Admissions office disseminates. Therefore, I first performed a formal content analysis of these print and digital materials to better understand what imagery and language was presented in marketing materials. Although emphasis was put on brochures, viewbooks, and online content, I also reviewed materials given to prospective students during their on-campus visits.

Semi-structured Interviews

In addition to content analysis, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with four Admissions staff to examine their methods and messaging to prospective study abroad students. Using information and trends found in the content analysis, I inquired about specific techniques the Admissions counselors use in getting their message across to prospective Maryville College students. This helped me understand how Admissions counselors determine what information each student receives. General topics of these interviews included advising tactics, aspects of the college that are emphasized in marketing, and presentation of the Maryville College experience to prospective students. For a complete list of interview questions, please see the staff interview guide in *Appendix B*.

To explore how marketing during the prospective student phase has influenced individual students' decision process, I interviewed 10 current fourth-year students about their experience as prospective students at Maryville College. I conducted semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with matriculating Maryville College students, sampling from students who had and had not studied abroad. Through the interviews, I explored the factors that led students to their decision to either study abroad or not, including the type of information they had received before they enrolled as students at Maryville College. To see a guide of interview questions for students, please see *Appendix C*.

Ethics of Research

As I began data collection, I wanted to gather frank and insightful experiences from students and staff; therefore, I created an environment that allowed participants to feel at ease while sharing their experiences. While arranging participants' interviews, I asked them to select a comfortable space to meet that would be quiet and private. Without this sort of environment, some participants might not have shared openly if they thought their answers could negatively affect their future advancement at the college. To protect the study's participants and create a comfortable atmosphere, I took pre-cautions to ensure participants' confidentiality throughout the research process. To recruit participants for this study, I relied on word-of-mouth and email communication. As relationships are strong among both staff and students at Maryville College, participants responded quicker and more positively to personal outreach. When recruiting interviewees, I clearly stated that I could not offer any monetary payment in return for their time and participation.

When seeking participants for this study, I included a consent letter in my initial request for interviews. The consent letter fully explained the purpose of the study, procedures, steps taken to ensure confidentiality and the voluntary nature of this study. In addition, all interviewees

had the study purpose and procedure thoroughly explained to them before beginning the interview and a signed consent letter was collected from each participant. To see the full consent letter, please refer to *Appendix D*.

Researcher's Positionality

As an international educator, I value international experiences and believe that an international experience is a necessary part of education – especially at the college level. During my high school and college experience, I went abroad multiple times and felt the effects it had on my education. Moreover, I realized that internationalization and student exchanges help build tolerance and empathy among the individuals directly involved. For this reason, I am committed to encouraging all students to seek an experience abroad. As a vocal and visible member of the Maryville College community, many staff and students know where my priorities lie in higher education. At Maryville College, I have advocated for additional and improved study abroad marketing to the Admissions office. Although I am a full staff member, it's widely known that I'm an intern rather than holding a salaried position. This has affected how staff and faculty members interact with me in a professional setting. The power dynamics shift in favor of full-time salaried staff and faculty.

Beyond my position at the college, I am also a white, atheist woman who is originally from another region of the U.S. In Maryville and the surrounding area, community seems an important factor for many people, including the staff and students at the college. Many of the members of Maryville College define their community by their church congregation or spiritual community. For many of the individuals I interviewed, I might have come across as an outsider and I might not have been given their full trust during the interviewing process. I built some trust with these individuals by listening to their experiences openly and without judgment during the interviews.

Data Management and Analysis

I collected and summarized data generated during the content analysis to determine trends and areas of focus for the interview stage. Images and language were analyzed thoroughly and organized by presence of study abroad or lack of study abroad representation. I calculated percentage of study abroad representation in marketing materials to determine if it is a focal point of college marketing efforts. Following this analysis, the type of language and imagery was analyzed to see if any specific tone was apparent in the materials. For materials that had study abroad representation, I compared summaries to determine if there were any commonalities or trends that emerged. It was crucial to complete this before interviews, as Admissions staff members helped to clarify or explain the rationale for the trends. Moreover, students might have helped clarify whether these tactics reached them, or if they went unnoticed.

Once interviews were completed, interview data was saved, coded, and interpreted using relevant literature. Individual interviews were recorded on my personal cell phone and saved to my personal laptop, which is password protected and locked in my private residence. Transcriptions and recording were saved under pseudonyms, with a master list saved separately from the recordings and transcriptions. Additionally, pseudonyms were created to protect participants' identities. After information was saved securely, I transcribed the interviews. Following transcription, interview texts were reviewed and coded. I interpreted data with both inductive and deductive approaches by first analyzing patterns that emerged from the data, followed by connecting the findings to the literature review (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Throughout the interpretation stage, I looked for commonalities among the data, as well as outliers in data. Trends that emerged in the data were evaluated through the lens of the relevant literature, which was reviewed earlier, to see if findings align with other studies. Data that did

not fit the pattern was closely analyzed to see how they supported or contested the dominant narrative.

Limitations and Delimitations

For this study, limitations included the sample groups, timing of data collection, and timeframe. Although this study employed a purposive sample of Admissions staff, the selection of Admissions staff interviewees was limited by the recruitment season. Timing of data collection also posed some limitations. I analyzed content and interview data between mid-January and early February, which is the height of the Admissions staff recruiting time period. It restricted staff availability to meet with me and did not allow for a range of staff perspectives to be collected. Therefore, I could only meet with four staff members from a team of over 10 Admissions staff. Despite the small number, the participants who were available were representative of the office.

Student participation was limited due to their course and personal schedules. However, the timing of data collection was early in the semester when students had more free time than later in the semester and were easier to recruit. I mitigated the limitations by contacting individuals early and reaching out to mutual contacts to encourage participation, especially for student interviewees. Additionally, the timeframe for this study was quite short, which didn't allow for follow-up interviews or additional data collection.

With the study timeframe, I chose to interview fewer students and staff members to fully explore their perspectives. Moreover, I chose to interview only matriculating students as they were nearing the end of their college career and could reflect more fully on their entire college experience. This allowed for a more well-rounded study in the time frame considering I conducted research alone.

Findings

For this study, the marketing of study abroad to prospective Maryville College students was explored to better understand how the messaging and information that prospective students receive may influence students' decisions to study abroad or not at Maryville College. To understand the entire scope of study abroad marketing to prospective Maryville College students, this qualitative study focused on the representation of study abroad in both print and virtual materials, admissions staff presentation of study abroad to prospective students, and current Maryville College students' memory of study abroad marketing during their prospective student phase. In what follows, I will introduce the content of Maryville College marketing materials and study participants. Then, I will introduce the findings of this study, highlighting overarching themes that emerged in the data, which include: lack of inclusion and representation of racial minorities; athletes and STEM students in marketing; misunderstanding of academic relevance of study abroad; minimal understanding of study abroad finances; and emphasis of inbound international community at Maryville College. Finally, I will conclude with reflections on key findings.

Maryville College Marketing Materials

The Maryville College Admissions has three main types of materials that prospective Maryville College students have access to: print materials, information presented online, and standardized email communications. Some print materials were also available on the Maryville College website, however, I analyzed them solely as print materials.

Print materials. The Admissions office has six main print materials that are available to prospective students. These materials include: *Maryville College Viewbook*, *Fast Facts Pendant*, *Bridging College to Career*, *Faith and Learning at Maryville College*, *Maryville College – 4 Years, 1 Institution*, and *Maryville College Outcomes*. To see a full list and description of these

materials, please see *Appendix E*. Apart from the viewbook, these materials are only available when students contact or visit Maryville College.

Digital materials. Study abroad information is available on the CIE's website, which is linked to the homepage of the Maryville College home page and the Admission's page. The CIE's page is written by international education professionals and connects study abroad to career by quoting Tillman's (2011) research, which confirms that employers value international experiences in employment candidates. The study abroad page is divided into multiple sections, including "Programs," "Financial Aid and Scholarships," "Apply to Study Abroad," and more.

Standardized email communication. The Maryville College Admission's Office sends out three standardized emails to all students on their list serve. These emails are short, topic-specific emails that are part of a larger campaign to all prospective students.

Study Participants: Staff and Students

Throughout the study, you will be hearing the stories of 14 participants of the study. Each of the 14 participants have a unique Maryville College experience and each of them are connected to study abroad in a different facet. All participants' names have been changed for this study.

Admissions staff. Four of the study participants are members of the Maryville College Admissions team and work with students prior to enrollment at the college. These team members are prospective students' first contact with Maryville College.

Abigail. Abigail has been with Maryville College for four years as the Director for Admissions and Financial Aid. She is the main person in driving the Admissions office and implements her strategies and visions within the office. She has little direct contact with prospective students, despite acting as the Admissions Counselor for Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and other undocumented immigrant prospective students. Abigail is a white, lesbian woman.

Ben. Ben has been the Assistant Director of Admissions for about two and a half years, and was an Admissions Counselor for the three and a half years prior. Before working for Maryville College, he was a student at the college and graduated in 2009. His role includes maintaining relationships within his region, as well as scheduling and planning travel for other counselors. Ben is a white, Christian man.

Connie. Since graduating from Maryville College in 2013, Connie has been working at Maryville College as an Admissions Counselor. She maintains her regions, and acts as the liaison with the Multicultural Center. Connie is a black, Christian woman.

Danielle. Danielle has worked for Maryville College for two years. She became acquainted with the school when she worked as a marketing consultant for the Maryville College Communications office. She is a freshman counselor and continues her relationship with communications office by working on print materials.

Study abroad students. Five participants are matriculating Maryville College students who have studied abroad on a short-term, Maryville College faculty-led program.

Jeff. Jeff is a senior finance and accounting student with a minor in psychology, who has played on the varsity football team for four years at Maryville College. He grew up in Tennessee and had never left the United States before studying abroad. He went on a January-term program to Ecuador in 2016. He is a white athlete, who also acts as a Resident Assistant on campus.

Anna. Anna is a biochemistry major with a minor in chemistry and psychology. She's also working towards her certificates in non-profit management and church management. She has gone on two short-term, faculty-led programs in Switzerland and Bonaire, and one volunteer

abroad program in Costa Rica. She is a white STEM student, who is involved on campus as a Residence Life and Admissions Ambassador.

Sam. Sam is a fifth-year senior in sociology and a minor in business. He went to Ghana on a January-term program in 2014. His two older sisters attended Maryville College and studied abroad, giving him a much-needed support network when he studied abroad. Sam is a black man, who was once well connected on campus, but now chooses to focus more on his career goals.

Lydia. Lydia is a religion, philosophy and sociology student at Maryville College. She is from the Knoxville area and has an older brother that studied abroad multiple times. She hadn't left the country until she went to Ecuador on a January-term program in 2016. Lydia is a black, upper-middle class student, who has been involved as an Alana Scholar, Anderson Scholar, Resident Assistant, Peer Mentor, leader of the Progressive Christian Alliance and was a member of multiple student organizations.

Bridget. Bridget is a deaf studies and American Sign Language interpreting major, who transferred to Maryville College two years ago. She is from upstate New York and has had some trouble transitioning to life in Tennessee. She had never left the United States until her January-term program in India in 2017. She is a white, upper-middle class student who is not involved on campus.

Non-study abroad students. Five participants are matriculating Maryville College students who have not studied abroad on any Maryville College study abroad program.

Wesley. Wesley is a fourth-year Maryville College student majoring in finance and accounting. He has played football at the college for four years and has been involved in a few other campus organizations. He is a white, upper-middle class man.

Natalie. Natalie is an economics major with minors in business and accounting. Natalie had traveled outside the United States once before enrolling at Maryville College with friends. She plans to attend law school and wants to study abroad there. She is a white, Knoxville native.

Janice. Janice is a biology major and is a Scots Science Scholar. She grew up around international students and members of the Vanderbilt community, where both of her parents work. She went to France with a short-term, high school program. She is a white, middle-class student.

Martha. Martha is a child development and learning major. She is a member of the Black Student Alliance (BSA) and Voices of Praise (VOP) and is very driven in her studies. Martha wanted to study abroad while at Maryville College, but felt she couldn't afford it. She is a black woman.

Kory. Kory is an environmental studies major, who is extremely active in the Mountain Challenge program. Despite originally believing he would study abroad at Maryville College, he never took the initiative to have an international experience. He is a white man.

Lack of Inclusion and Representation of Underrepresented Student Groups in Study Abroad Marketing

After speaking to the participants and reviewing the marketing materials, the data suggested a lack of inclusion and representation of racial minorities, athletes, and STEM students in study abroad marketing. To begin understanding more about the lack of diversity, I explored the inclusivity and diversity in marketing materials. Marketing on all platforms represented little racial and academic diversity in study abroad, while marketing on digital platforms did not exhibit inclusive language to encourage typically underrepresented student groups to study abroad. Without representation of diverse students in study abroad marketing, it makes it harder

for underrepresented students to understand that the opportunity is accessible for them (Carter, 1991; Sweeney, 2013).

Following this trend, I closely analyzed what messaging students may or may not have received during their time as a prospective student. Although four of the 10 students clearly remembered study abroad marketing during their prospective student phase, I found that four of 10 students never received information about study abroad during their prospective student phase, despite participation in on-campus visits. The lack of messaging to certain groups of prospective students could mean that some groups, such as students of color and athletes, may not receive early exposure to study abroad information. For example, Jeff recalled that his visit on campus was “all about football and education,” but didn’t include study abroad information (Personal communication, January 30, 2017). Additionally, Martha remembered being exposed to “the experience of Maryville college and coursework and everything that we would be doing,” but did not recall any mention of study abroad (Personal communication, March 9, 2017). Brux & Fry (2010) suggest that early exposure is critical in gaining family support for study abroad. Sweeney (2013) and Lu, Reddick, Dean, & Pecero (2015) argue that study abroad information sharing at multiple stages is essential to underrepresented student participation.

In Admissions print material, material imagery includes the racial and geographic diversity of the student population, but is not represented in study abroad specific areas. As these materials are used for general college marketing, students from all backgrounds, academic fields, and interest are represented in the imagery. Only the *Maryville College Viewbook* has imagery that is directly related to study abroad. In the two-page spread titled “Pack Your Bags,” the viewbook includes three photos of students abroad. Two of these photos are of individual white

women abroad and one image includes a group of 12 white, Maryville College students on the beach.

The Admissions email campaigns on study abroad do not represent study abroad for varied academic fields or underrepresented students. One of these emails focuses on study abroad program facts, such as program types and availability of scholarships. Two of the emails give examples of students that have had an international experience and what they have done while abroad. Three of the four examples showcase students who have done internships abroad with notable companies. One student's research experience is illustrated. None of the student examples mention the academics of the students' study abroad experience. The images in these emails are not representative of all academic fields abroad or of underrepresented student groups, instead showing only white students.

For some students who are not acquainted with study abroad and the academic side of the program, the organization of Maryville College's website may be a barrier to finding information. The CIE's study abroad page includes the most information on study abroad programming and prospective students are directed to the page from the Admissions page – although through the CIE webpage. The words “study abroad” do not appear on the Admissions website, and students may not find it intuitive to go to the CIE page to find information. When asked about the experience of finding information on study abroad, Martha, one of the seniors who did not study abroad, responded “I don't know if it's on Maryville College's website, or I've just never seen it” (Personal communication, March 9, 2017). When I demonstrated how to find information on the website, she countered with:

[Y]ou could put Study Abroad, rather than Center for International Students. What's the point of us going to that tab? Study Abroad should have its own tab. Or have it on

something else. But we're not international students, so why would we click on it?

(Personal communication, March 9, 2017)

Students without previous exposure to study abroad may not find it intuitive to search for information through the CIE webpage. As Robinson (2007) suggests, students may not understand the connection of an international experience and the academic component without early exposure, which can be further complicated by the inaccessible language on the website, especially for those students without prior awareness of study abroad as an educational experience.

Furthermore, the Maryville College website provides information on all programs offered at the college, however the language does not encourage inclusion or diversity in program types and participants. For example, on the programs webpage, under summer study abroad programs it states: "Study Abroad: Learn a language. Study a specific topic. Summer programs are designed to give you four to eight weeks in another country" (Maryville College, 2016). The emphasis on language learning in the first sentence may deter students who do not wish to study a language abroad. Additionally, the lack of program topic examples may not allow students to grasp what sort of topics are offered in study abroad. Furthermore, the main page includes a quote from Tillman (2011) on the importance of study abroad for students' future careers. However, the quote puts emphasis on "[e]mployers, especially those doing business internationally," which may exclude some students who are not majoring in business. Additionally, it does not address other areas of opportunities and growth that study abroad can lead to, such as a more reflective and integrative learning experience (Gonyea, 2008) or development of essential soft skills (Anderson, Lawton, Texeisen, & Hubbard, 2005; Black &

Duhon, 2006; Carlson, 1990; Freed, 1995; Lewin, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007, Savicki, 2008; Williams, 2005).

Similar to the print marketing materials, the CIE study abroad webpage imagery is not inclusive – it presents a white female face to the audience with little representation of all populations. Throughout the CIE’s study abroad pages, there are 70 pictures from study abroad students on the study abroad home page. Of these 70 pictures, 31 of these pictures have people in them, constituting 44%. These pictures mainly include pictures of young, white females abroad. When counting the representation of underrepresented populations in study abroad, representation varies. Students of color are represented in three of the 31 pictures, being represented in roughly 10% of the images. Students of color make up approximately 25% of Maryville College’s population (D. Cantrell, Personal communication, October 25, 2016). This may reinforce the idea that study abroad is an opportunity meant for students traditionally participating in study abroad – white, upper-class women (Comp, 2007; Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator, 2009), especially in conjunction with the lack of study abroad information shared throughout the prospective student phase.

When recalling how and when students receive study abroad information, admissions staff stated that there is little representation of study abroad to all students during the prospective student phase. When speaking to Ben, he admitted unprompted that “we don’t really do a good job of promoting study abroad” (Personal communication, January 30, 2017). Danielle shared a similar sentiment, stating “[i]n all honesty, unless they specifically ask about it, I’m not sharing information about it. It’s an afterthought” (Personal communication, February 2, 2017). Existing research demonstrates that for many students, there is already a lack of awareness of study abroad (Carter, 1991; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013). If populations are visiting the college with

no prior knowledge of study abroad, they may leave without understanding what opportunities are available at Maryville College.

Student participants concurred that study abroad messaging is not reaching all prospective students, as many of them do not recall any study abroad information being provided during their prospective student phase. Four of 10 student participants received information of study abroad during their prospective phase – three received information at on-campus recruiting events and one found most of the information online. Even among these four students, two of them would not have received information unless they sought it out themselves. Anna, one of the students, had visited another university and heard about their study abroad opportunities. She thought the opportunity was very exciting, and therefore sought out information when she came to a campus recruiting event. Anna recalled her visit to an on-campus recruiting day, and she confirmed that she only received information after seeking it out. When asked if she received any information on study abroad, she recalled, “I don’t think so, until I came to a Meet Maryville event. And then I went to the [study abroad] table” (Personal communication, January 31, 2017). The other two students specifically recalled messaging only about a faculty-led, science program in Bonaire at events for prospective students.

The tropical ecology program in Bonaire was remembered by two students who came to targeted campus events, which cater to high performing students and those who can afford to visit campus. Janice remembered coming to Highland Days, a campus recruitment event, and her student mentor mentioned going to Bonaire. This program was of interest to her, but she wasn’t sure it would work with her academic plan. During a Scholars Day event, Kory recalled hearing the Bonaire faculty leader speak: “I remember Bonaire being brought up because Dr. Unger was a speaker at Scholar Day. I remember thinking, yea I’m going to do that” (Personal

communication, March 9, 2017). The Bonaire program could be used to demonstrate curricular integration in STEM fields and could be an example that students in the areas of study that do not require a semester study abroad experience still benefit from study abroad; however, the relevance of study abroad in STEM fields is only being delivered by a single faculty member at a limited number of outreach events.

Study abroad programming is being mentioned at some campus events, but Scholars Day, Highland Days and Great Beginnings are events that many students cannot attend because they cannot afford the travel expenses or cannot miss a day of high school. If information is only reaching certain groups of students, students that could benefit from early exposure to study abroad (Robinson, 2007) and hearing the messaging at multiple stages (Lu, Reddick, Dean, & Pecero, 2015; Sweeney, 2013) may be missing the message – like four of the 10 students interviewed for this study.

Four of the 10 students interviewed did not receive any information during their prospective student phase, even at on-campus recruiting events. Martha recalled attending Great Beginnings, a Maryville College event organized specifically for admitted students the summer before their freshman year. Despite multiple sessions on coursework and their academic career at Maryville College, she remembered that the Admissions staff did not talk about study abroad (Personal communication, March 9, 2017). Similarly study abroad student Jeff thinks about his experience at a football recruiting day, when he didn't receive any information on study abroad. As an enthusiastic study abroad supporter, he suggested that Admissions talk more about study abroad during recruitment: "And that [recruitment day] would be a great opportunity for them [Admissions] to talk about study abroad. But I don't think they ever did. It was all about football and education" (Personal communication, January 30, 2017). Similarly, Wesley said that he

didn't remember talk about study abroad at the football recruiting day that he attended. Jeff, Wesley, and Martha are members of underrepresented study abroad populations. The early exposure to study abroad may have made study abroad seem like a more likely option for them (Mazon, 2010).

Regardless of whether underrepresented students received study abroad information during the prospective phase, it became evident that the program is not perceived as a realistic opportunity for some groups. Two of the 10 students interviewed felt that the study abroad program is not an inclusive program, being marketed primarily to white, privileged students (Lydia, Personal communication, February 14, 2017; Martha, Personal communication, March 9, 2017). Furthermore, two students spoke about the perception of student athletes at Maryville College and how student athletes may not always feel like they have access to programs such as study abroad (Jeff, Personal communication, January 30, 2017; Lydia, Personal communication, February 14, 2017). Lydia and Martha, both women of color, directly shared that students of color do not feel they receive the same information as white students. Martha simply stated that she didn't "think it's [study abroad] widely marketed to students of color" (Personal communication, March 9, 2017). Lydia elaborated on the same idea in her interview by openly discussing her view of educational tracking at Maryville College and why she might have been successful:

I'm a senior so I might as well say the whole truth. I think that some of it is, on a lot of levels, being of a higher socioeconomic class...I think that immediately filtered me into a certain group of people. I was pushed to a more white [sic] crowd of friends, academics. A path to success I feel. I think that having a lighter skin tone has allowed me to have more leeway in doing things. I swear it's true. I think that I look like I could be from

multiple places and allows me more movement at the school. I talk about this with my black friends and I think this still affects what you get to do, where you get to go and how people perceive you. Being a peer mentor, being an RA, I've kind of been able to, I hate saying it like that, I don't want to say it like that, but I think making a way for myself has allowed me and I think that I've gotten to do a lot of things because of that. I think that some people when they get here, they get on a track and it just goes somewhere.

(Personal communication, February 14, 2017)

In her statement, Lydia also alludes to the feeling among black students that they may not be receiving the same educational experience as their white peers. Lydia's perception of study abroad resonates with the historical analysis of study abroad by Comp (2007) and Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator (2009), who found that study abroad caters to a very homogenous group of students, typically white, middle- to upper-class women. This feeling of dissatisfaction and tracking may influence students' decision making process not only for study abroad but other academic opportunities.

Lydia continues by saying that in her opinion, "it's [study abroad] marketed toward sharp, smart and, I think, privileged students. I think it's marketed towards white students and that's the truth. And I think it's definitely marketed towards students who are more engaged in academics than athletics" (Personal communication, February 14, 2017). Lydia is not the only student who mentioned the perception of student athletes and the opportunities afforded them at Maryville College. Jeff, a student athlete, brought up that athletes are perceived differently than many students on campus: "There's that stigma around student athletes that they put athletics first and they don't respond to emails. They don't respond to authority figures very well"

(Personal communication, January 30, 2017). As the findings show, those students who do not fit

the traditional study abroad image – white, middle-class women (Comp, 2007; Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator, 2009) – feel that they do not receive sufficient study abroad information before enrolling at Maryville College or during their time at the college.

Misunderstanding of Academic Relevance of Study Abroad

Despite well documented study abroad benefits for all students and the marketing campaigns that the CIE is spearheading, there is still many misconceptions about the academic relevance of study abroad. As discussed above, study abroad can help returned students become more reflective learners (Gonyea, 2008), increase graduation rates of first-generation students (UC San Diego, 2009), and solidify students' career goals (Wilson-Oyelaran, 2011). These benefits transcend all academic arenas and would serve the whole Maryville College campus, potentially making the campus an academically stronger environment for all students. While speaking to Maryville College Admissions staff and students, there was little understanding of academic relevance of study abroad unless it is directly written into students' academic requirements. However, two study abroad students without study abroad requirements cited how their study abroad experience directly benefited their academic career at Maryville College.

Two study abroad students returned to campus from their faculty-led program with a strong start in their senior study project – a large, research-based project that every student must complete during their time at Maryville College – even if study abroad was not a requirement of their studies. Sam and Anna both credited their study abroad experience with influencing their senior study project topics. Early in Sam's interview, he said that he had very little interest in international matters and found it difficult to understand his place in the world when he began attending Maryville College. However, by the end of his Maryville College experience, he found

himself deeply rooted in international health issues. He attributed this shift in perspective to his study abroad program in Ghana:

While there we talked to a sociologist and epidemiologist and they were telling us about all the disease in the slum because of no running water. I felt so bad because I could escape that. But this trip also helped me figure out what I want to do with my life and it helped me figure out my thesis. I focused my thesis on tropical diseases in Ghana. But I pulled a lot of things from this trip. I was disturbed by a lot of things around me but I was also interested in the subject matter. We kept a journal the whole time and keeping track of what I saw and heard really helped me. (Personal communication, February 9, 2017)

Although Sam wrote his thesis in the area of sociology, he found space to incorporate his international experience into his senior thesis. In his study on the academic focus in study abroad returnees, Hadis (2005) found that students returned from abroad mature academically while gaining a higher than average level of curiosity and interest in academic matters. Sam's ability to connect his international experience to his senior thesis, which demonstrated interdisciplinary interest and curiosity, may parallel the academic maturity that Hadis (2005) found in his study at the College of New Jersey. If communicated properly, these personal stories could demonstrate to all prospective students the benefits of study abroad in any academic field.

Similarly, Anna's story also shows the academic relevance of study abroad outside of language study or international business/relations. Anna came to Maryville College highly interested in study abroad, but didn't realize she would be doing her data collection for her Biochemistry major in Bonaire. With faculty support and outreach, Anna learned that she could do an entire semester's worth of data collection for her Biochemistry senior study during a 10-day spring break trip. Working closely with the faculty leaders, she designed and completed her

senior study research in Bonaire and finished her entire study before her senior year. When describing what motivated her to go to Bonaire, Anna recalled “that trip was more research based. It was a lot less I want to go study abroad in Bonaire and more I have this cool opportunity to go do research” (Personal communication, January 31, 2017). Like Sam’s story, Anna’s story shows the academic relevance of study abroad for all students. Additionally, it demonstrates specific career-related skills gained by a young scientist that will most likely benefit her when applying to graduate programs, which is evidenced by the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the QS Global Employment Survey (Molony, Sowter & Potts, 2011; NACE, 2015). Given the misconception about the study abroad benefits, many families do not understand the academic relevance of study abroad and are concerned about their students’ graduation being delayed by study abroad (Robinson, 2007; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013). Therefore, including academic success stories that directly connect study abroad and post-graduation goals in marketing materials may convince prospective students and their families of the necessity for study abroad in their collegiate experience and ultimately debunk the common misconceptions.

The faculty-led trip to Bonaire is one of Maryville College’s most successful programs, to which students and Admissions material attested; however, the messaging of the program in print materials may not be the most effective, given the academic nature of the program. The *Maryville College Viewbook* paints Bonaire as a tourist trip, rather than an academic program: “Enroll in Tropical Ecology, and you could travel to the Caribbean for a week of snorkeling and island exploration” (p. 10). The tourist language used for programs suggests that programs are a luxury, rather than a necessary element of students’ education. Like the print materials, admissions staff occasionally mention the opportunity, but do not weave programs into the

greater scheme of the Maryville College academic experience. In *The Guide to Successful, Short-term Programs Abroad*, Spencer and Tuma (2002) suggest that study abroad programs be marketed as credit-bearing, academic experiences to ensure that the experience remains relevant to all audiences. Studies by Gonyea (2008), UC San Diego (2008), and Wilson-Oyelaran (2011) support this theory, which may indicate a need to shift current Maryville College study abroad marketing trends in order to potentially increase awareness of the academic nature of study abroad. If stories like Anna's were promoted alongside the program information, it would better demonstrate how the skills gained by students can improve their academic experience once they return to campus. Anna finished her senior thesis research in 10 days, allowing her to complete her thesis earlier than many of her peers (Personal communication, January 30, 2017). This experience shortened the time frame of her senior thesis work, improving her overall mental wellbeing during her last year of college and helping her gain necessary skills for her future career.

Many non-study abroad students and admissions staff could not connect the benefits of study abroad to the students' academic path. Admissions staff members admitted to not sharing much study abroad information in general, but information sharing may also be dependent on prospective students' academic interests. Kory, for example, remembers asking about study abroad during his visit at Maryville College, because his initial academic interest was in international business. When he told his admissions counselor about his interest, he remembered hearing a lot about semester and academic year opportunities from admissions (Personal communication, March 9, 2017). Janice also remembered her admissions counselor mention it, but didn't continue to encourage it when Janice spoke more about her academic goals (Personal communication, February 27, 2017). When I asked Connie, an admissions counselor, about her

perspective of study abroad, she answered that Maryville College had a strong study abroad program given that so many majors require study abroad. Then, she gave an example of speaking to a student interested in psychology and how she might connect it to study abroad. After she began sharing her example, she interrupted herself and said “actually, psychology isn’t a good major for study abroad” (Personal communication, February 4, 2017). This may suggest that Connie believes study abroad fits in with some majors more than with others and may delay some students’ graduation. Her belief that some majors will be delayed by study abroad align with the barriers to study abroad found by Schulze (2016) and Sweeney (2013) and therefore may be reinforcing the barriers to study abroad for some students.

A similar misconception was held by student participants, as four of the 10 students felt that study abroad would not complement their academic experience at Maryville College and could potentially delay their graduation. Janice mentioned that she might have gone abroad, but she was worried about her grade point average declining due to a difficult study abroad experience (Personal communication, February 27, 2017). Wesley, the student athlete who did not study abroad, didn’t think that there were study abroad programs that would complement his finance and accounting major. He didn’t see the relevance for his major to study abroad, stating: “I don’t know if there was a trip that would have benefited me. But I mean looking back on it, I had a few buddies who did and they enjoyed it” (Personal communication, February 20, 2017). Although he regrets not studying abroad, he still could not connect study abroad and his academics. Two other students admitted that although finances were the main reason to not go abroad, they also could not conceptualize how study abroad would have benefited their studies at Maryville College (Natalie, Personal communication, February 24, 2017; Kory, Personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Students are not the only stakeholders that struggle to connect academics to study abroad, as professional informational brochures created by the Admissions and Communications departments rarely make the connection of study abroad and academics. Although five of the materials reference international experiences or study abroad, most of the language and presentation surrounding the topic does not imply the academic nature and the ultimate academic benefit of study abroad. One of the six print materials specifically states that study abroad fulfills college requirements, such as the Maryville College Works significant practical experience, and references the direct curricular benefit of study abroad for a student's education. *Bridging College to Career* informs prospective students that study abroad is an option in completing a curricular requirement to graduate. In the four other materials, the language and design do not convey international experiences as an academic aspect of a student's education. In addition to study abroad barriers, such as lack of study abroad information and awareness about funding opportunities available to students (Carter, 1991; Schulze, 2016; Sweeney, 2013), the absence of academic connections of study abroad complicates the issue of who may consider study abroad opportunities.

Minimal Understanding of Study Abroad Finances

Many student participants reported that understanding the financial structure of study abroad was a major barrier for them, which is of little surprise given the lack of printed information on the subject. Study abroad is a financial investment that many students may not consider if they do not understand the long-term benefits associated with the experience, especially among students who are low-income, first generation, or minority (Robinson, 2007; Sweeney, 2013). Students with limited financial means are more likely to forego a study abroad experience than their peers with higher socio-economic status (Robinson, 2007; Schulze, 2016;

Sweeney, 2013). However, students who have access to scholarships may be more likely to participate than students without knowledge of scholarship availability (Ganz, 2006; Greenbaum, 2012). At Maryville College, the financial commitment of study abroad was often brought up by staff and students. However, many of the recruiting materials do not mention access to study abroad scholarships or the financial model of Maryville College semester programs.

Maryville College Admissions staff reported that many students assume they cannot afford study abroad based on the perception of high tuition at Maryville College. Danielle spoke about the types of conversations surrounding study abroad when advising prospective students, such as the financial investment of study abroad. When discussing the financial investment of study abroad with prospective students and their families, she shared the following: “That’s the part that scares people, how much will it cost me to do. I mean, I don’t want to lose track and I want to graduate on time. And I can’t afford to go anywhere else because Maryville College is already so expensive” (Personal communication, February 2, 2017).

The perception that study abroad is incredibly expensive – even more so than Maryville College tuition – is something that all four Admissions staff brought up. Abigail, the Director of Admissions, said that often students “rule it out right away because they think that it isn’t affordable or may not be something that they can do” (Personal communication, January 27, 2017). Each staff member addressed this issue differently, but only Connie promoted the idea that study abroad is an affordable option for all students. Ben, the Assistant Director of Admissions, said he is often asked about the opportunity of study abroad and often doesn’t know how to properly address study abroad finances with students. He says he informs students that there are scholarships, but doesn’t know exact costs or payment structure for the program (Personal communication, January 30, 2017).

The inability of Admissions staff to accurately and confidently speak about the financial structure of study abroad programs may be limiting the population of students considering the opportunity from the beginning. As Ganz (2006) and Greenbaum (2012) pointed out, study abroad scholarship information may influence students' decisions to go abroad or stay back. As research shows, without accurate information on the financial structure of study abroad or scholarships available to students, the perceived financial barrier to study abroad may be reinforced in Admissions communications to prospective students and their families. In addition, the understanding that semester programs are the same price as Maryville College, and being informed that the financial aid transfers to those programs may encourage some students to go abroad who originally thought they could not afford it (Carter, 1991).

With approximately 50% of Maryville College students receiving Pell grants, the CIE's main priority is raising awareness of the affordable study abroad structure and study abroad scholarships. However, my interviews with 10 Maryville College students demonstrate that there was little awareness among all students of the study abroad financial structure or scholarships. Among the five students who did study abroad during their time at Maryville College, all five students mentioned financial means being an obstacle that they overcame. Although each student mentioned financial restrictions, only three of the five students who went abroad received scholarship funding. Those students said study abroad would not have been possible without the scholarship funding they received.

Students who study abroad and are not aware of scholarship options often miss scholarship deadlines and do not receive any funding. Lack of scholarship funding causes some students to drop out of the study abroad program, because they feel they cannot afford it without the additional funding. Some students may end their study abroad quest when they don't receive

funding, while others may seek out summer or seasonal work that may allow them to earn enough money to study abroad. Bridget, a transfer student, applied for study abroad late and missed the deadline for study abroad scholarship applications. However, shortly after being accepted into her program, she found a paid internship for the summer that allowed her to study abroad on the faculty-led program to India (Personal communication, February 15, 2017). Jeff shared that he received some scholarship money, but he still needed to work more than usual the summer before his program started to cover additional expenses (Personal communication, January 30, 2017).

While scholarship awareness is high among returned study abroad students, awareness among students who did not study abroad was low. Three of five non-study abroad students reported that finances were the main obstacle in going abroad. Of those three students, only one student reported knowing about study abroad scholarships. Wesley and Martha reported not knowing about Maryville College specific study abroad scholarships. When students do not know about funding, they are less likely to take the risk of applying for study abroad programs (Carter, 1991; Sweeney, 2013). This may suggest that student athletes and students of color at Maryville College are not only getting less information about study abroad itself, but are not receiving information about opportunities that may encourage their participation.

Although scholarship awareness was high among this group of students, awareness of the semester abroad financial structure was low. Three of the ten students could vaguely explain the exchange structure of semester programs. Janice, the biochemistry major, could explain how exchange programs worked financially because she attended Study Abroad 101 sessions. Two other students understood aspects of it because many of their close friends had gone abroad for a semester (Personal communication, February 27, 2017). This is little surprise, considering the

financial structure of semester study abroad is discussed only briefly on the study abroad webpage. The information is not included in any promotional materials for the college.

Emphasis on Inbound International Community at Maryville College

With an emphasis placed on the international community at Maryville College, prospective and current students may feel that an international experience is not a critical experience needed to gain intercultural competencies. Each of the 10 students interviewed for this study remembered hearing about the international population during their prospective student phase. Although Admissions staff said they forget to mention study abroad until they were asked about it, staff and students confirmed that the on-campus international population is part of their common story told to every incoming student. This may increase international curiosity and awareness among students, but it may suggest that students do not need to study abroad to gain crucial intercultural skills. When students feel that a study abroad experience is not critical to their academic education and those skills can be gained through on campus contact with international students, they may not see the need to overcome obstacles to go abroad.

Maryville College takes pride in their international student population, therefore it is of little surprise that each individual interviewed for this study brought up the Maryville College international population in conversation. The *Maryville College Viewbook* emphasizes the international population as part of their global campus, more than the opportunity of outbound study abroad opportunities. Each of the staff members interviewed for this study proudly talked about the international student population on campus, emphasizing over 30 countries present at Maryville College at any one time. Sam vividly recalled Ben, the Assistant Director of Admissions, visiting his high school and telling him about the high number of international students at Maryville College. Sam recalled his interaction with Ben: “[Ben] actually gave me a

lot of information and talked to me a lot about the international population here. Even though it is such a small school, he told me about the high percentage of international students. There was something interesting about meeting the run of the mill students” (Personal communication, February 9, 2017).

Many of the students interviewed considered Maryville College to have a culture of study abroad based on the number of international students on campus, rather than outbound students. Sam said that when he was considering Maryville College, he “was told that Maryville had a huge international community. But when I came to campus, I thought it was cool to meet people from different walks of life, but I never considered going abroad. My international friends would say, ok I’m going home. Come visit me. But I never really considered going” (Personal communication, February 9, 2017). Although some students seek out their own international experiences after interacting with international students on campus – much like Sam did, it does not necessarily lead to increased international curiosity or exploration for all students. For one student interviewed, having a large international population on campus made her feel like she was gaining intercultural awareness without going abroad. When I asked Natalie if she felt that Maryville College has a culture of study abroad, Natalie answered “yes” and explained that the presence of inbound study abroad students built a culture of study abroad more than outbound study abroad students. She noted:

In my classes, people from abroad being here that, even though it’s the opposite, that makes an impression on me. That is great to see people coming to little old Maryville college and that seems great to me. But I really only know about five people that have studied abroad from here. But I really do feel like with the cultures and different

ethnicities cultivates that culture here...especially with the diversity. (Personal communication, February 24, 2017)

Natalie felt that she was interacting with a diverse population on campus and therefore did not need to seek an additional international experience to gain crucial intercultural communication skills. Although there are many benefits of an international community on campus, the presence of an international community does not guarantee that domestic students gain intercultural competencies or desire to have their own international experience. Staff and faculty may need to encourage domestic students to step out of their comfort zones to go abroad and continue strengthening skills learned on campus.

Conclusions

Several barriers to study abroad were discovered throughout this study, which may result in certain populations lacking essential information when deciding whether to study abroad. Participants felt that study abroad marketing was not inclusive, resulting in some students of color, athletes, and STEM majors feeling unwelcome or uninformed about study abroad options. Students and staff alike had little understanding of study abroad's academic relevance, which may limit who understands the benefits of an international experience. Many students thought they couldn't afford study abroad, and promotional materials and admissions staff did little to improve the understanding of the Maryville College study abroad financial structure. Finally, many students felt that they gained awareness and skills from the international population on campus and therefore did not need an international experience to solidify intercultural competencies.

Some of the aforementioned barriers may be perpetuated through Admissions staff beliefs on academic relevancy of study abroad misunderstanding of financial structures. The CIE

and Admissions office may benefit from more regular briefings on study abroad benefits, structure and student success stories. In turn, Admissions would be equipped with more up-to-date information and could speak more confidently to prospective students on study abroad opportunities. Perhaps, they may even be able to tie this information into their messaging on the Maryville College international community.

Additionally, marketing materials and outreach events may not demonstrate diversity, inclusivity or the academic relevance of study abroad for all. Adding images to the study abroad website and marketing materials with students of color, athletes or STEM students may reflect an opportunity that is open to all students. Moreover, arranging the website, materials and outreach events to make study abroad more visible could help students find opportunities and information more easily. The language surrounding study abroad could also be developed to show the relevance for students that are not required to study abroad. Along that same vein, the international population could be highlighted as a draw to Maryville College, but also be convey this community as a stepping stone to the next step – study abroad. Framing the message to prospective students as an opportunity that will help them develop skills that could be further strengthened overseas is critical. The message could become one of opening doors to an international experience, rather than an experience that could replace an experience abroad.

Lastly, all staff at Maryville College may consider being more intentional when informing underrepresented students of their opportunities. As some students still do not feel that study abroad is plausible for them, intentional outreach to groups at all prospective student events, freshmen orientations and other on-campus events for enrolled students becomes paramount. Outreach to student groups on campus may be an additional method to effectively target underrepresented students groups, such as athletes, students of color and STEM students.

This may also help in making the campus a more open and welcoming place for all – by encouraging increased communications among stakeholders through multiple venues – another proven mechanism in increasing underrepresented population in study abroad (Carter, 1991; Malone, 2007). In all cases, collaboration between the CIE, Admissions and other campus departments in sharing information and success stories throughout the student experience may encourage a more diverse study abroad population, especially when used in conjunction with current marketing practices.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Racial Demographics

Racial Demographics for the State of Tennessee, Maryville College and University of Tennessee

| Demographic Group | Tennessee State Demographics¹ | Maryville College Demographics² | UT – Knoxville Demographics³ |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|
| White | 78.8% | 74.6% | 78.3% |
| Black | 17.1% | 12.5% | 6.6% |
| American Indian | 0.4% | 0.3% | 0.2% |
| Asian | 1.8% | 1.1% | 4.2% |
| Hispanic | 5.2% | 3.6% | 3.9% |
| 2 or more ethnicities | 1.8% | 4.5% | 3.3% |
| Non-resident | Unspecified | 3% | 1.5% |

¹TN State Census, 2015

²D. Cantrell, Personal communication, October 25, 2016

³Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2016

Appendix B: Interview Guide – Admissions Staff

Title: Did You Get the Message?: Influence of Study Abroad Marketing to Prospective Students in Maryville College Study Abroad Demographics

Interviewer:

Alissa Morson

Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute

Purpose:

The purpose of this interview is to better understand your advising tactics, the college highlights, and how you present the Maryville College experience to students.

1. Could you tell me about your experience here at Maryville College?
2. What role do you play within the Admissions office?
3. How do you begin advising sessions with prospective students?
4. What are the main aspects of Maryville College that you share with prospective students?
 - a. How do you decide what programs/organizations you tell students about?
 - b. What messaging do you share with prospective students about study abroad?
5. What materials do you use when advising prospective students?
 - a. What information do those materials include on study abroad?
6. What's your perspective on Maryville College study abroad?
 - a. Do you believe that Maryville College has a culture of study abroad?

Appendix C: Interview Guide – Maryville College Students

Title: Did You Get the Message?: Influence of Study Abroad Marketing to Prospective Students in Maryville College Study Abroad Demographics

Interviewer:

Alissa Morson

Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute

Purpose:

The purpose of interviews with Maryville College students is to better understand the decision making process to study abroad and information received through marketing, during their college career and before.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
 - a. What has your experience been at Maryville over the last four years?
2. Have you studied abroad during your time at Maryville College?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. What motivated you to study abroad?
 - ii. Were there any specific resources, people, or events that led you to your decision to study abroad? If so, please give me an example of those.
 - iii. How did your family support you in your decision?
 - iv. How did your faculty advisor and other professors support your decision?
 - v. What were your expectations of study abroad?
 - vi. Do you feel that those expectations were met?
 - b. If no:
 - i. Why did you decide not to study abroad?
 - ii. Were there any specific resources, people, or events that led to your decision to not study abroad?
 - iii. Can you share what you know about study abroad at Maryville College?
 - iv. Did any staff or faculty ever suggest the option of study abroad to you?
3. Before enrolling at Maryville College, what did you know about study abroad?
 - a. Before enrolling at Maryville College, which study abroad opportunities were you aware the college offered?
 - b. Before enrolling at Maryville College, how did you receive most of your information about the college?

4. What's your perspective on Maryville College study abroad?
 - a. Do you believe that Maryville College has a culture of study abroad?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter

Title: Did You Get the Message?: Influence of Study Abroad Marketing to Prospective Students in Maryville College Study Abroad Demographics

Principal Investigator and Contact Information:

Alissa Morson
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute
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Maryville, TN 37804
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Purpose of Study:

For this study, the marketing of study abroad to prospective Maryville College students will be explored to determine how the messaging and information that prospective students receive may influence students' decisions to study abroad or not at Maryville College. To understand the entire scope of study abroad marketing to prospective Maryville College students, this qualitative study will focus on the representation of study abroad in both print and virtual materials, admissions staff presentation of study abroad to prospective students, and current Maryville College students' memory of study abroad marketing during their prospective student phase. This study will help the CIE and Maryville College understand the complete cycle of study abroad marketing and identify the strengths and weaknesses of that marketing to better reach all populations of students.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a 30-minute individual interview with the principal investigator on study abroad marketing to prospective students. As a staff participant, you will be asked to reflect on what messaging is presented to prospective students, and how that information is disseminated.

As a student participant, you will be asked to reflect on what study abroad information was presented to you during your prospective student phase, as well as other factors that shaped your decision to study abroad or not.

Confidentiality:

All the information you provide will be strictly confidential, and your name will not appear on the transcript of this interview or in data presentation. Instead, your interview will be assigned a pseudonym that is only known by the principal investigator of this study.

Note About Voluntary Nature of Participation and Statement About Compensation:

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or may discontinue your participation at any time during the interview. While I cannot compensate you for your time, your participation will be invaluable in understanding study abroad marketing practices at Maryville College.

Information About This Study:

You will have the opportunity to ask, and to have answered, all your questions about this research in person at the time of the interview, or by emailing or calling the principal investigator any time before or after your interview. Contact information for the principal investigator is on the top of this letter. All inquiries are confidential.

Participant's Agreement Statement:

If you agree to participate in my study, I would appreciate if you could sign your name and date on this form and present it at the time of your interview.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Alissa Morson

Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute



I have read the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date

Appendix E: Print Materials**Maryville College Print Materials**

| Title | Material Description |
|---|--|
| Maryville College Viewbook | This is a 16-page viewbook that touches on every aspect of Maryville College. This material is available in print and digitally on the Maryville College Admissions page. This publication includes a 2-page spread on study abroad. |
| Fast Facts Pendant | This material is in the shape of a sports pendant and has Maryville College fast facts printed on the back. One of the fast facts boasts that 40% of Maryville College have an “international experiences.” |
| Bridging College to Career | This half-page material highlights the Maryville College Works program and includes that study abroad can be counted as a significant practical experience for students. |
| Faith and Learning at Maryville College | This brochure describes spiritual life at Maryville College and does not include information on study abroad. |
| Maryville College – 4 Years, 1 Institution | This is a letter-size document that “introduces” the reader to Maryville College. It includes the same fast facts as the Pendant described above. |
| Maryville College Outcomes | This booklet includes stories of Maryville College alumni and what they are doing with their degrees from the college. There is no mention of study abroad in this publication, but includes a story from an alum who was in the Peace Corps. I considered this an “international experience.” |
