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Measuring What Matters: Exploring Student Motivations to Inform International Student Recruitment

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MEASURING WHAT MATTERS:
EXPLORING STUDENT MOTIVATIONS TO INFORM INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT RECRUITMENT

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PIM 75

A Capstone proposal draft submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, international students in the United States have surpassed the one million mark (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2016(a). Research found here highlights the goals and motivations of this growing constituency and examines factors that influence international students to choose educational experiences in the United States.

Two online surveys were distributed, one to international recruitment agents that work for UC Berkeley Extension, and another to international students. The paper examines survey responses along with existing research to offer data-driven theories on how international educators might more effectively approach student recruitment and program design. The research concluded that international students seek out information primarily from program websites. People such as family, friends, agents, and professors were also influential in student decision making, and were the primary way students first found out about study abroad opportunities.

Important student decision-making factors were the course or academic subject of interest, as well as the desired school. Factors like geographic location and return on investment—how the experience will improve job prospects in the host country—were also of interest. Job and potential career prospects are of great significance to international students, with career-focused activities and career services (Roy et al., 2016) shown to be quite important to this group.

Introduction

With "American colleges educating more international students than ever before" (McKenna, 2015), international education professionals must build deeper knowledge not only of outbound study abroad experiences, but also an understanding of international students coming to the United States, their motivations for seeking knowledge outside of their home countries, and what drives their career aspirations and interests.

My own career in international education has spanned over a decade and focused mostly on study abroad programming—sending American students abroad to participate in short-term internships. Through a combination of knowledge gained on the job and academic coursework I developed skills in international education marketing. As I began my studies at SIT Graduate Institute (SIT), however, I realized through classroom discussions and readings that although I had a strong grasp of marketing principles and an understanding of what American students were looking for in a study abroad experience, international students were much more of a question mark for me. As I got farther into my studies I also began work at a university and my responsibilities became more and more focused on international student recruitment. As I learned about international student mobility in higher education I observed, more often than not, that universities in the United States and around the world are prioritizing international student recruitment, yet there also seemed to be a scarcity of current and actionable information on best practices to recruit this growing constituency. I decided to conduct research to ask international students themselves what drives them to participate in educational programs abroad, and what factors play into their decision to do so. I hope the findings serve education professionals to develop

experiences that are more relevant to the international student demographic, as well as methods for effectively recruiting international students to study in the United States. Today, in light of the 2016 election and subsequent efforts to restrict immigration into the United States, sharpening our toolbox and finding ways to better showcase our country as an attractive destination for students is more important than ever. Throughout this time of political upheaval it is imperative that we learn to become even stronger advocates of student mobility and intercultural exchange.

Over the last decade, international students in the United States surpassed the one million mark; during the 2015/16 academic year alone the number of international students in the United States increased by over seven percent (IIE, 2016c). What is propelling such growth? Several factors have combined to facilitate the increasing internationalization of higher education worldwide and greater student mobility. One factor is the globalization of education to meet student demand. Increasingly, universities are opening their doors to provide their services to diverse audiences. "The advent of multinational higher education institutions makes it possible to disseminate new curricular and other innovations quickly and to meet the immediate needs of students and the national economies of countries that lack adequate providers of higher education" (Altbach, 2015). With globalization has also come an expectation of a workforce that is highly skilled, multi-lingual, and culturally aware. International student mobility has grown, at least in part, to provide the knowledge now expected of workers competing in a global economy. Today's international student wants to gain a competitive advantage in the workforce and access a top quality educational experience, even if the source of that education exists outside of one's own country (Roy, Lu, & Loo, 2016).

Growing international student demand has coincided with a robust "supply" of higher education. Today, state budget cuts for public higher education in the United States have become the norm. To alleviate financial pressure, universities are more than willing to open their doors to international students who pay full tuition (Saul, 2016). International student recruitment can often be part of a larger, comprehensive internationalization strategy, yet revenue is often a principle driver behind the push for increasing international student admissions. Recruiting international students is not as simple as supply and demand, however. There is continuing debate on the ethics of using international students as a way to alleviate financial pressures facing universities today (Saul, 2016), as well as controversy on *how* international students are recruited worldwide, principally surrounding the use of agents (Ruby, 2013) who are paid commission for enrolling international students in educational programs abroad.

No matter how they are recruited or the particular motivations behind bringing international students to campus, students today have many choices and, together with their families, make the final decision on what school to attend. Alongside the changing political climate in the United States, reported as having a negative impact amongst international students (Baer, 2016), there are a plethora of other issues including cost and visa challenges (Roy et al., 2016) that international educators face in convincing international students to study in their country or at their institution. In light of this, how can U.S. institutions tap into this constituency and achieve greater internationalization on their campus? According to Kemp,

> The growing dependence of...universities on international students, the speed
> and variability of market evolution, and the strong competition, all indicate the
> need for greater understanding—better market research and intelligence, and

greater consideration of why international students might choose particular

destinations, and what might influence this choice. (2016)

The research highlighted in this paper attempts to shed light on some of these issues. As we strive to understand this audience, however, we will confirm that international students come from distinct areas of the world with their own unique cultural contexts. It is evident that international students are not easily defined, thus an ongoing analysis is necessary. Segmenting students into subgroups by geographic region or behavior is also helpful to identify common threads amongst students, thereby identifying the correct approach, the ideal program, and the right student that is the best fit for each school. This research explores the aforementioned topics and analyzes broader themes relevant to international students as a whole, to answer the question: *What are the factors and motivations that influence UC Berkeley Extension and other international students to choose educational experiences in the United States?*

Literature Review

As the number of international students grows (McKenna, 2015), so has the amount of research and resulting theories related to international student behavior and trends. This review analyzes literature on student decision-making behaviors, particular elements of educational experiences that matter most to international students, and regional variations in student preference and behavior. In addition, it explores contested issues surrounding international students, such as the focus on revenue generation versus educational quality, sometimes called academic capitalism (Rhoades, 2016), the use of agents for recruitment, and the lack of equal access in terms of the

small proportion international students and universities that are actually benefit from this sort of educational exchange.

Understanding Decision Making Behaviors: International Student Personas

According to Knowles principles of andragogy, adult learners are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact on their job or personal life (Knowles, 1970). International students today exemplify this theory, as they desire learning experiences from which they can accrue tangible skills and improve career and work prospects (Roy et al., 2016). Those working to recruit international students to their schools and universities must recognize how adult learners synthesize and seek out information in order to and leverage this effectively.

World Education Services (WES) research notes that international students can be segmented into distinct personas that more accurately portray their educational needs and priorities. Just as all American students cannot be lumped into one category, the differences between international students are complex and important to analyze. WES researchers Choudaha, Orosz, and Chang segmented the U.S.-bound international student population according to academic preparedness and financial resources—crucial factors that often determine whether international students are able to access educational experiences abroad. The top two international student segments identified were dubbed *strivers* and *explorers*. Strivers were categorized by their high academic achievement but lack of financial resources, conversely explorers were generally not high achieving academically, instead placing more importance on the personal and growth aspects of their international study experience. Explorers were also most likely to access student services at the host institution more heavily, and more likely to employ the use of an international agent to help navigate study abroad options prior to making an application decision (Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang, 2012). This research

segments students based on key decision-making factors, differentiating students who may value study abroad experiences for vastly different reasons. The WES research also explores international students' information needs in terms of what resources they consulted while making their decision to study abroad, concluding that the vast majority (90 percent) of students used institutional websites and 67 percent consulted family and friends to obtain information. Interestingly, the research highlights that one-third of respondents reported using social media to learn more about programs or universities they were considering, and researchers called out social media as an emerging resource with growing potential to influence student decision making, particularly among students from China (Choudaha et al., 2012). Students profiled in this research were also segmented by country, specifically students from China and India who make up one-third of the international student population (Choudaha et al., 2012). There was some congruence between the groups, for example interest in information on post-graduation career prospects was important to 55 percent of Chinese and 46 percent of Indian students. Conversely, there was significant divergence in the importance of obtaining information about tuition and living expenses, reported as very important for 46 percent of Indian students, but only 22 percent of Chinese students (Choudaha et al., 2012).

This information is an important starting place for international student recruitment, as a university or school can assess its own academic strengths and course offerings and decide which student segment is the best match for its programs, or alternately if program design and/or recruitment strategy changes are conducive to success. As it happens, the best-matched students are often the ones the school would be the most successful in targeting within its recruitment strategy.

What Matters to International Students?

In addition to its work exploring student decision-making behaviors, in May of 2016 WES surveyed over 4,000 international students for its report *Improving the international student experience: Implications for recruitment and support*. Here again is evidence of overarching trends but also important differences when segmenting students, this time by world region or country of origin.

According to the data, the biggest overall motivator for international students to study abroad "is the belief [57 percent of respondents] that the education systems in destination countries (in this case, the United States) are comparatively better than those in their home countries. This perception was especially prevalent among Sub-Saharan African and Chinese respondents" (Roy et al., 2016). For those recruiting international students to higher education programs in the United States, educational quality therefore is an important point to highlight and reinforce, especially when communicating with African or Chinese students and families. The educational quality of U.S. institutions is an existing perception to be continually reinforced.

Another significant point of consensus across international student groups profiled in the report was that "career and work prospects are huge motivators among almost all groups of students from all over the world" (Roy et al., 2016, p.iii), yet "out of all the areas for which students were surveyed, career services could perhaps use the most improvement. In particular, offices should invest more time and resources in helping students land jobs and advance careers, whether in the U.S. or abroad" (Roy et al., 2016, p.16). Because international students see higher education abroad as a way to improve one's earning potential and career prospects (Ortiz, 2015) this finding is not necessarily surprising—especially when we reflect on the theory that education is perceived as valuable when it is immediately applicable (Knowles, 1970). Nevertheless,

the report does highlight the necessity for institutions to do a better job of walking the walk, so to speak, and providing more robust career services for international students. This may mean more parity in services as compared to domestic students, or perhaps simply different tools or approaches that take into account the additional needs of international audiences. Because the survey findings point to significant international student dissatisfaction in the area of career services, it is recommended that institutions "provide internship and job pathways" (Roy et al., 2016, p.11) for international students rather than simply pointing them to generic job listings or networking events and hoping for the best. Indeed, since "word-of-mouth referrals from international graduates are tied to the belief that their U.S. educational experiences were worthwhile" (Roy et al., 2016, p.14) and career services are increasingly an essential component of student satisfaction, "an investment in international student satisfaction can actually be considered a marketing investment: it reduces the potential for negative word of mouth, increases the potential for positive word of mouth even to the extent of a student becoming a 'brand advocate…'" (ICEF, 2013b).

Regional Variations

When examining international student motivations for studying in the United States, the WES report highlighted significant variation by country of origin. For the purposes of this research, the top four motivations for studying in the United States according to percentages of survey respondents are listed here, along with breakdowns by country of origin.

Exploring international student motivations on a deeper level reveals significant variation amongst students from specific regions. As discussed, the primary motivation to study in the United States across the majority of WES international student survey respondents (57 percent) was to obtain higher educational quality (Roy et al., 2016, p.6).

Amongst students that cited the educational quality available in the United States, international students from Sub-Saharan Africa (70 percent), China (63 percent), and India (60 percent) (Roy et al., 2016, p.6) were most likely to mention this as influencing their decision. This was followed by the second most common motivation of survey respondents—40 percent pointed to the opportunity to gain work experience outside of their home country. This was most valued amongst students from India (52 percent), Sub-Saharan Africa (45 percent) and China (39 percent) (Roy et al., 2016, p.6). Subsequently, the opportunity to improve career prospects in one's home country was valued by a total of 37 percent of survey respondents. This was especially important for students from Canada (49 percent), Oceania (47 percent), and Sub-Saharan Africa (45 percent) (Roy et al., 2016, p.6). Finally, an interesting deviation from factors related strictly to academic and career prospects, the fourth most common motivation for international students was the opportunity to experience living in a foreign country, with 29 percent of all survey respondents citing this as a major factor in their decision, particularly those from Oceania (42 percent), Europe (38 percent) and China (36 percent) (Roy et al., 2016, p.6).

Controversy and Contested Issues

International students and academic capitalism. "As a group, these highly mobile students are viewed as a rich economic resource, with a strong focus on their revenue-generating potential manifest in national and institutional policies around the globe" (de Wit, 2016). Frequently in the news, public higher education today is facing immense budgetary challenges. State disinvestment in public colleges and universities, some say, means, "chasing international students for the revenue they bring but at the cost of the quality of education that can accrue to the university" (Rhoades, 2016). The rush to recruit increasing numbers of international students is

controversial, with some arguing a school's selection process could be influenced by the financial motivation inherent in their admission. At its worst, financial pressure could prompt institutions to admit students that may not meet the highest academic or linguistic standards. One argument posits this form of "academic capitalism" could undermine academic quality as well as the reputation American universities currently hold as rigorous institutions of higher learning (Rhoades, 2016). Admitting international students as a way to overcome financial woes may also lure universities away from their inherent mission of education as a vehicle for knowledge and societal advancement, reducing the transfer or knowledge to a commercial transaction. The pressures of globalization and the movement of students across borders have influenced universities to think more like businesses and less like educational institutions (Altbach, 2015) in order to survive. Yet educators and strategists insist that universities and schools must transcend financial pressures and instead develop a long-term, sustainable vision that promotes more profound internationalization that is not dependent on international recruitment and that instead centers on promoting internationalization for its academic and societal benefits. "Even in challenging financial or policy environments, colleges and universities can expand their global reach…through a commitment to integrate international perspectives throughout the institution's ethos and missions." (Hudzik, J. K., & McCarthy, J. S., 2012).

Using agents to recruit international students. Another major controversy surrounding international student recruitment relates to the "agent debate," as it is often called. On one side are universities, in the United States as well as Australia and the United Kingdom, that contract agents as *de facto* local university representatives to promote their educational programs abroad to local audiences. Agents often serve in places where universities may not have either the expertise or the

resources to hire full time staff and in return many agents are awarded hefty commissions, often for each student enrolled. According to some universities, agents are a way to internationalize their campus in a way that is more cost effective than employing a full-time team in multiple geographic regions, or repeatedly flying home-based staff around the world to attend recruitment events and nurture partnerships. Agents also attract foreign students, such as the *explorer* student segment described previously, who may not be at the top of their class. Agents also guide students who may not have the tools or in-depth knowledge necessary to conduct a successful visa interview or submit a competitive application to a university abroad.

Yet opponents of third-party agencies voice concerns about the ethical ramifications that arise from recruitment tactics that often occur far away from the purview of the home university and the potential for agents to use questionable practices meet quotas or to gain additional income. With an agent's livelihood is so closely tied to convincing students to attend particular programs, their priority may be submitting as many applications as possible rather than carefully assessing student needs and goals. The risk, some say, is that this creates a perfect storm for enticing students into programs that are not a good fit or for which they may not be qualified.

Even the experts themselves seem torn on the benefits brought about by agents versus the potential pitfalls. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), for example, drafted a policy for their 2011 *Statement of Principles of Good Practice*, taking a stand in banning the use of international agents and citing concerns about incentive payment and conflicts of interest. Then, in 2013 after much discussion, NACAC lifted its proposed ban before it was published, largely due to outcry from its members (Saul, 2016). In its 2013 *Report of the Commission on International Student Recruitment*, NACAC seemed to give mixed signals, stating its members should

not provide per student compensation but also acknowledging the use of agents as a way to better manage what would otherwise be barriers to effective recruitment (Redden, 2013). The report discussed recruitment challenges such as the lack of institutional knowledge in order to operate effectively in a multitude cultural contexts abroad and also described the U.S. higher education landscape as one that is extremely complex and that "prov[es] difficult even for domestic students and families" to navigate (National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2013).

        Student access. Student mobility, especially in the higher education sphere, is wholly undeniable. "The OECD projects that the world's population of international students will reach eight million by 2025. This represents a...very impressive, projected growth rate of 60 percent in overall global mobility over the next decade" (ICEF, 2015). Yet with all this cross border movement, who is actually accessing the multitude of higher education opportunities being put forth? As one might suspect, recruitment efforts are often skewed toward children of the new global elite (de Wit, 2016) with China, India, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea as the top four sending countries of international students to the United States (IIE, 2016c). Not coincidentally, these four countries all rank within the top 20 with the highest gross domestic product worldwide (World Bank Group, 2017). Although some countries offer scholarships or financial assistance in an effort to broaden access to international education opportunities for their citizens, these opportunities are few in number and quite competitive, offering only a small percentage of interested scholars the necessary funding to pursue higher education abroad. The result is a cycle that compounds existing global educational inequities, with self-funded students from wealthy families seizing the opportunity to attend prestigious universities abroad, while students from

low income families are left to whatever educational opportunities they can manage on a limited budget, if any at all.

One final issue related to access is the number of American universities that are able to successfully internationalize their campuses and increase diverse perspectives in the classroom. While overall numbers of international students climb, just a small proportion of American schools are seeing a more international student body with "only 200 out of nearly 4,500 American postsecondary institutions enroll[ing] approximately 70 percent of all international students" (Choudaha, 2015). This statistic demonstrates that access to the myriad financial and cultural benefits that come with higher numbers of international students are not dispersed equally amongst universities in the United States, and likely in other countries as well.

Background Information

As part of internal efforts to generate data on the international student and international agent audiences, in early 2017 the UC Berkeley Extension marketing department conducted focus group research. The data from two focus groups described below are taken directly from an internal report. The findings presented here touch on the type of information that is most influential to student decision making, as well as information that gets students excited about a school or program. The perspectives detailed within the focus group data serve to provide background and context to supplement findings from the original research that will be presented in the subsequent section.

UC Berkeley Extension International Student Focus Group

Nine international undergraduate student participants enrolled in a UC Berkeley Extension program were selected for a two-hour focus group discussion in early 2017. The focus group was comprised of six students from China, two from Korea and one from Mongolia. All students were taking part in the same study abroad experience through UC Berkeley Extension, one that places international students in UC Extension and UC Berkeley campus courses for one to two semesters. A staff member on the UC Berkeley Extension marketing team moderated the focus group.

When asked about what influenced their decision to attend UC Berkeley one student cited a personal meeting with UC Berkeley Extension staff as playing a major role in their decision. Two of the students found out about the program through a recommendation from a third-party referral network, while six students became aware of the program through relationships established at their home schools. These six cited Berkeley's reputation for specific academic departments such as Engineering, Physics or Chemistry, which they learned about from respected professors and faculty. No students cited working with agents.

For the student data that follows data detailed numbers were not recorded when the focus group was conducted, nevertheless students overwhelmingly cited faculty recommendations as the biggest influence in their decision. Many also cited searching university ranking websites for schools in their field of study as well as university social media accounts. There was agreement across the group that alumni testimonials were very influential in their decision-making process if the alumni came from their home university. The students were uniform in claiming that their parents played little role in their decision. For most students, consideration of study abroad programs began after their second year in university or whenever their school made the opportunity available

to them. Regarding the use of websites in their decision-making process, there was a consensus that they were not searching visiting English language websites but instead sites in their native languages.

International Agent Focus Group

Similar to the international student focus group discussed above, an online focus group was conducted with international agents—representatives that guide students through the application and admissions process to study abroad. The focus group was organized by the UC Berkeley Extension marketing department in early 2017 to obtain qualitative data on international student needs and decision making. A total of 16 agents signed up to take part with 11 agents representing 10 countries answering the majority of the questions online.

Two questions were posed to agents. One was: *What types of information is most influential to [student] decision making?* The other was: *What type of information gets them excited about a school or program?* Below is a summary of the responses. Because students' country of origin and cultural background can influence their priorities and decision making, the country of origin of the agent is also included below. The biggest student influences named were:

- Cost/scholarship opportunities; prestige of institution. (Japan)

- Price and the possibility of work while studying. (Brazil)

- Quality of the programs and cost. (China)

- The value or the degree and its recognition. Prestige of the university. Career opportunities upon completion of studies. (Latvia)

- University ranking, availability of courses, fees, work rights, safety and security. (Australia)

- College rank, location, scholarship/assistantship opportunities and courses. (India)

What was most exciting to Students?

- Interactive websites (with school tour, information and photos about the facilities); tips about the city and the university system; feedback from alumni; information available in their mother tongue; less text and more audiovisual information. (Brazil)

- Usually students get excited with pictures and videos of the place (city and campus). Students also like testimonials from other students. Parents like the rankings or prestige of the program and university. (Chile)

- Usually they get excited with other student's stories, especially if we can make them talk to each other. (Argentina)

- Video testimonials from students/alumni about university and life in the city. Social media posts on student activities and team building events. (Latvia)

- Localized brochure, video (subtitled) and flyer. (China)

- Landing pages that highlight the program's features; scholarship opportunities; internship/work opportunities; promotional videos from alumni talking about the program and job options afterwards. (Japan)

Common themes emerged from the online focus group across various countries of origin. Primary student decision-making influences cited were institution/university websites and social media platforms. In addition, easily searchable program information and personal stories such as video testimonials, ideally from other students from a similar country of region, were said to be compelling. There was also discussion about the influence of parents who often guide students in their decision making.

Agents cited that in order for parents to be comfortable sending their child abroad, information on safety and availability of cultural offerings from their home country (food, place of worship, immigrant communities) would help them to feel more at ease. Cost was a common question for all involved in the decision-making process.

Research Design

To build on the previously collected data and solicit a perspective from a broader audience, two online surveys were distributed using Survey Monkey. The goal of these surveys was to learn what international students value and are looking for in a study abroad experience. Online surveys gathered qualitative data from current or former international students who studied in the United States as well as agents who work for UC Berkeley Extension.

First, an international student survey was launched online. The international student research sought to understand: age, academic level and major at the time of study abroad; major decision-making influences; academic, cultural and logistical priorities when choosing a program abroad; and thoughts on how to improve their decision making or experience. The student sample selection focused on non-U.S. students who self-identified as having studied or participated in an educational type-experience in the United States in the past 10 years. The criteria of a 10-year window was chosen in order to ensure a higher number of survey responses were received reflecting a broad range of educational experiences, but was capped in order to ensure the results came from students whose influences and choices most closely reflect international students today who are currently considering or are involved in educational experiences abroad.

The student survey was emailed to an internal list of 3,461 UC Berkeley Extension students and alumni; 359 opened the email. Because the online student survey link was the primary focus of the research and intended to reach a broader audience compared to the agent survey, it was also distributed beyond the initial UC Berkeley Extension email. It was sent mostly to higher education professionals, who were then asked to distribute it to their own students and alumni. The survey was also distributed to recognized international student audiences, mostly through Facebook groups and to NAFSA Knowledge Communities: (Recruitment, Advising, Marketing and Admissions Network; Research and Scholarship Network; NAFSA Research Connections Network; International Student Advising Network; and Admissions & Credential Evaluation Network). Email lists/listservs: Inter-L International Education Networking Listserv and the SECUSS-L listserv. LinkedIn groups: American International Recruitment Council (AIRC); International Student Recruitment for U.S. Schools & Universities; SIT Graduate Institute Students & Alumni; NAFSA: Association of International Educators; NAFSA Graduate Student Community; SIT Graduate Institute, International Education Low-Residency Students 2015-2017; Bay Area Young Professionals in International Education (BAyPIE); NAFSA Region XII; University of Maryland Study Abroad Alumni Network; yPIE: Young Professionals in International Education in DC; Studies on International Students; International Study Abroad Network; UC Berkeley Extension International Diploma Programs; and Career Service Professionals for International Students in the U.S.. Facebook pages and groups: NAFSA Association of International Educators; SIT California; Northern CA Education Abroad Association (NCEAA); SIT for all! If you're not invited, we're not invited; SIT Graduate Institute ISAP (International Students of Academic Programs); UC Berkeley Extension International Diploma Programs; UC Berkeley Extension IDP; Spring 2017

UCB Extension Int'l Programs; Fall 2016 UCB Extension Intnl Programs; SIT MA in
International Education Low Res: 2015-2017 Cohort; VSRSC (UC Berkeley); UC Berkeley
Extension College Foundations Program; and lastly, my own personal Facebook page.

In addition to the above listservs and social networking sites, the survey was sent
via email or Facebook message to various friends as well as professional colleagues and
contacts in the field of international education, including members of the (BAyPIE)
leadership team (separate from the BAyPIE LinkedIn posting mentioned above), the SIT
Graduate Institute PIM 75 Master's in International Education cohort, and the Director
of International Student and Scholar Services at SIT Graduate Institute.

The international student survey resulted in responses from 348 international
students. Surveys from seven international students were eliminated due to a stated
program date range prior to the 10-year cap, three were eliminated who selected the
United States as their country of origin, and one was eliminated who identified a
university outside the United States as their study abroad location.

To compliment the student survey, a much smaller-scale agent survey was
distributed online. The agent research aimed to shed light on: how students hear about
agent services and common modes of agent-student communication; popular schools,
countries, and majors; and agent's perspectives on students' academic, cultural and
logistical priorities when choosing a program abroad. The agent sample selection was
chosen based on access to relevant agent contact information. It was also a way to build
on data from the previous UC Berkeley Extension agent focus group discussed above
and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this agent population. A link to
the agent survey was sent via email by a UC Berkeley Extension staff member to an
internal list of 91 agent contacts that were identified as having connections to UC
Berkeley Extension. Twenty-six agents opened the survey email and responses were

received from 17 of those agents. As the agent surveys were sent to a prequalified group, no survey responses were eliminated.

Theoretical Framework

Data was interpreted through Malcolm Knowles' theory of adult education, known as andragogy, which posits that adults approach learning as problem solving and learn best when the topic is of immediate value (Knowles, 1970). This theory was also reinforced by data found in the literature review—students desire learning experiences from which they can accrue tangible skills and improve career and work prospects (Roy et al., 2016). Data was gathered in an effort to explore and understand why some international students see programs abroad as immediately valuable and gain insight into why they choose to invest time and significant resources in these global experiences. Beyond educational theory, all data was also interpreted from a marketing and recruitment perspective to identify data that could inform international student recruitment strategy at the tertiary education level.

Findings

International Student Survey

Online survey responses were received from a total of 348 international students. Seven were eliminated due to a stated program date range prior to the 10-year cap, three were eliminated who selected the United States as their country of origin, and one was eliminated who selected a university outside of the United States as their study abroad location, leaving a total of 337 viable respondents. To encourage a higher number of survey responses, not all questions were marked as required; the number of skipped responses for a particular question, if applicable, is noted.

Participants were asked their country of origin (where they were born) with results appearing in Figure 1, below. Fourteen respondents skipped this question. Due to the wide variety of answers, for simplicity countries that were represented by less than 10 respondents (with the exception of Canada which did not fit into an existing geographic region) were combined into geographic regions as categorized by the Institute for International Education in their Open Doors reports (IIE, 2016b). Countries that were represented by 10 or more respondents are shown individually. Survey respondents represented several geographic locations, with students from Europe (22.9 percent), Brazil (16.7 percent), China (15.2 percent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (13.9 percent) representing the top four regions or countries and combining to make up 68.7 percent of all respondents.

Figure 1 — International student country of origin
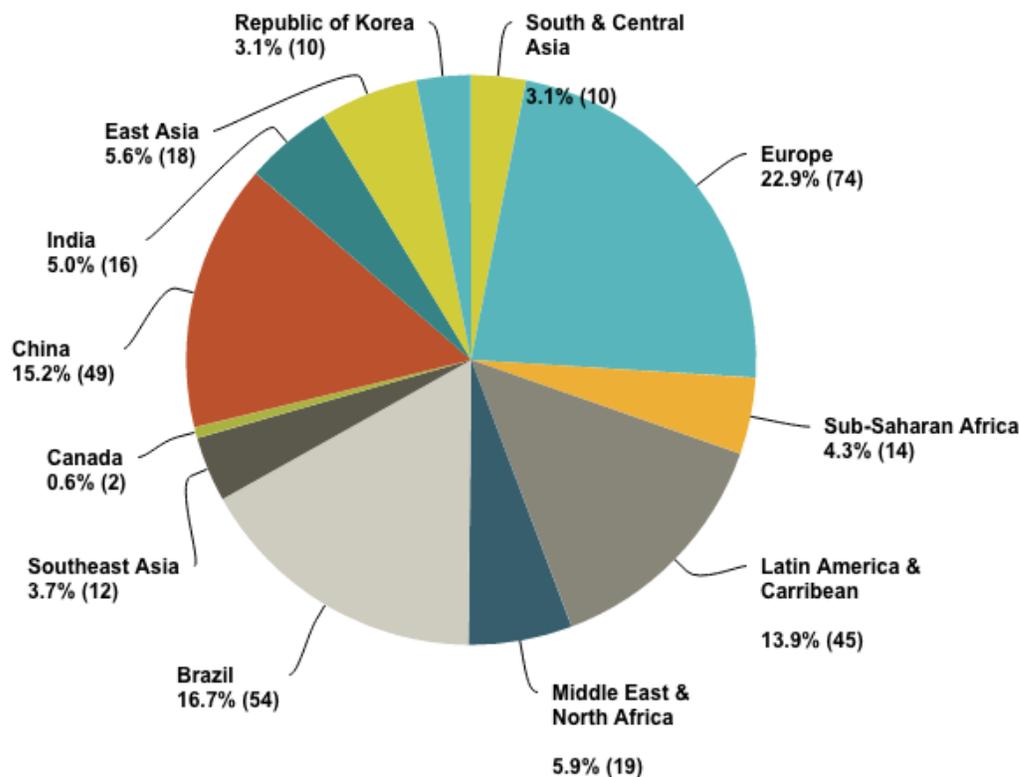
Participants were asked their age at the time of their study abroad experience. Over half of all respondents (56.7 percent) were somewhere within the 22-30 range when they went abroad, 17.8 percent were 18-21, and 13.1 percent were 31-35. Important to note is the 10-year cut off for this study, which may have impacted the average age of respondents.

Participants were then asked at what point in their schooling they participated in a study abroad experience. The majority (42.4 percent) were graduate students, followed by 31.8 percent undergraduate students and 20.2 percent working professionals as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 — Academic level at the time of study abroad
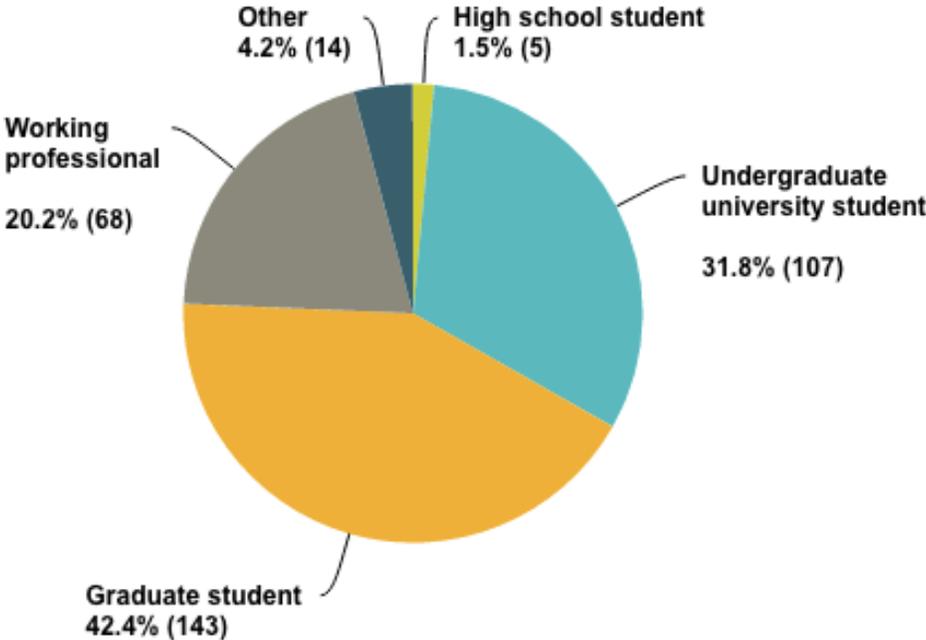
To learn more about where international students are enrolling, survey respondents then selected the name of the school or university they attended in the United States. In order to effectively group this data, survey participants that were the

sole respondent from their schools or universities were placed together into the "other" category. If possible, respondents that listed more than one school were placed into a larger grouping with others that had submitted responses from one of the same schools. Program names were requested as an optional part of this question but not analyzed for the purposes of this research. The vast majority of respondents identified themselves as having attended UC Berkeley Extension (42.1 percent) or UC Berkeley (25.8 percent), not surprising given the researcher's place of employment thus greater access to students and alumni from this institution. All results are shown below in Figure 3.

**Figure 3 — Name of U.S. school/university attended**
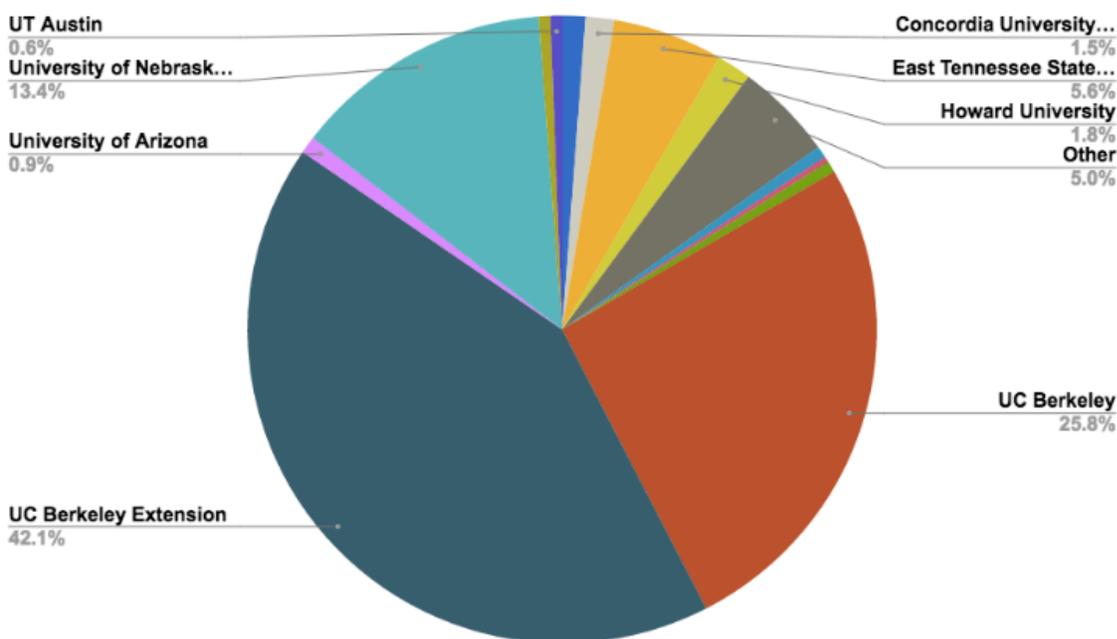
Survey respondents were also asked about their major or area of study while in the United States. Ten respondents skipped this question. Some responded with more than one subject or major and each academic subject named was counted separately for the purposes of this research. Open-ended responses varied but answers were

consolidated whenever possible. Because of a data processing error, complete and detailed data is not available for this survey question, however the top three majors were noted. Finance, business and computer science, in that order, appeared in the highest number of responses. Other subjects that appeared frequently were management, entrepreneurship, psychology, economics and English.

To ensure that survey respondents met the criteria of having participated in their study abroad experience in the previous 10 years or less, the survey asked respondents to select the date range that included the year(s) of study that they spent in the United States. Respondents that selected "other" were reviewed to ensure these dates also fell within the requested range. The majority of respondents (67.1 percent) participated in their study abroad experience within the past five years, with just over 20 percent falling into the 2006 to 2011 range.

Respondents were asked to select a statement that described why they decided to study overseas. Over 73 percent of respondents cited a career-related answer, either improving their career or job prospects (39.5 percent), needing additional education or skills to advance in their career (21.7 percent), or wanting to change careers (11.9 percent). Respondents that selected "other" cited reasons such as a desire to improve their English language skills or knowledge overall, mandatory semesters abroad instituted by their school, or wanting to access quality education "great programs/universities for my field of study." Figure 4 below displays a summary of their responses.

Figure 4 — Describe your decision to study overseas
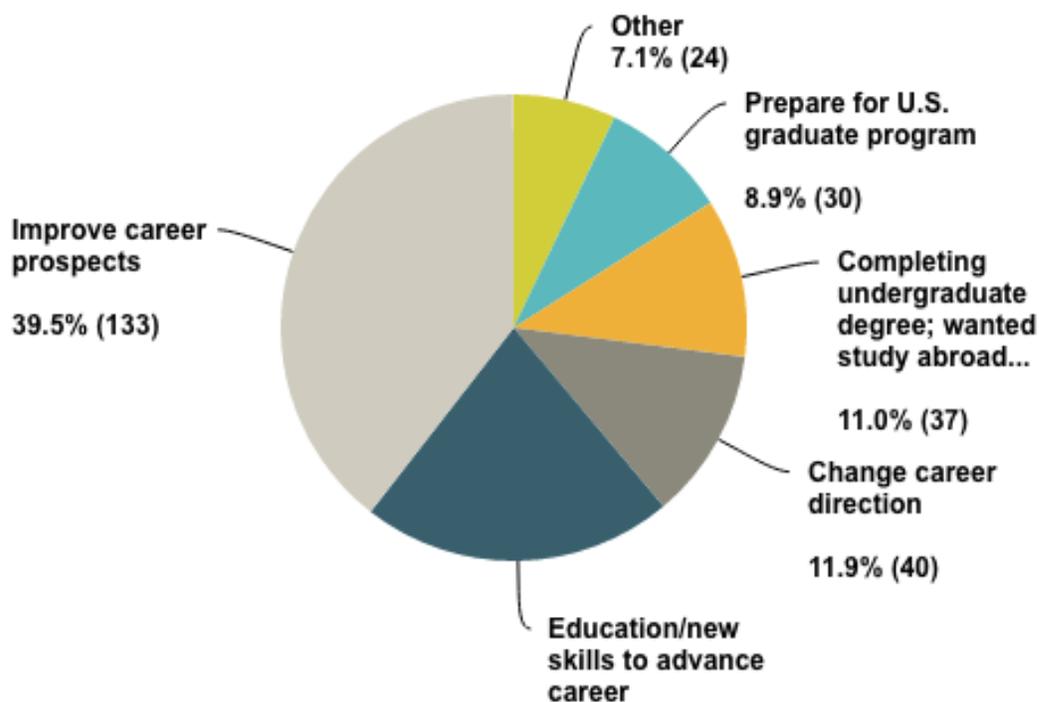
Survey participants were asked how they found out about study abroad opportunities. Close to one third (31.8 percent) of respondents found out through a friend or family member, while close to a quarter (23.1 percent) found out through an Internet search. 11.6 percent cited meeting with an educational adviser or agent. About 10 percent selected "other"— these responses discussed finding out because of existing partnerships with their home university as well as other word-of-mouth referrals such as "friend's co-worker" or "older classmate." Despite having a pre-filled choice available for agent, a few respondents selected other and then cited "study abroad agency," "travel agency" or similar agency, suggesting these could potentially be counted as part of the agent category. Professor/instructor was selected by 9.2 percent of respondents. Results are illustrated in Table 1, below.

Table 1 — How did you first find out about study abroad opportunities?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Friend or family member	31.8%	107
Internet search	23.1%	78
Meeting with educational adviser or agent	11.6%	39
Other (please describe)	10.1%	34
Professor/instructor	9.2%	31
Co-worker or supervisor	5.6%	19
In-person educational fair or event	3.6%	12
Website advertisement	3.3%	11
Social media	1.2%	4
Other advertisement	0.6%	2
Total		337

Respondents also noted the resource or people that most helped with their decision to study abroad, as seen in Table 2 below. Interestingly, although the majority of respondents cited first hearing about study abroad opportunities through friends or family, the most useful resource from a decision-making perspective was website program descriptions (19.9 percent). Here, respondents distinguished between family (14.2 percent) and friends (12.5 percent) as to who helped the most with their decision. Educational representatives/agents (12.2 percent) and a school professor/instructor (10.4 percent) round out the top five decision-making influencers. Amongst responses in the "other" category (5.3 percent) respondents mentioned employers or themselves as the biggest influencers.

Table 2 — Resource or person/people that helped the most with the decision to apply to a program overseas

Answer Choices	Responses	
Website program description	19.9%	67
Speaking to family about program	14.2%	48
Speaking to friends about program	12.5%	42
Educational representative/agent	12.2%	41
Professor/instructor at your school	10.4%	35
Professor/instructor/staff at the school you were thinking about attending	8.6%	29
Former student of the program	8.0%	27
Information on program application process	5.6%	19
Other (please specify)	5.3%	18
Current student at the school/university	2.4%	8
Videos or multimedia on website	0.9%	3
Total		337

Survey takers were asked to focus on the academic portion of their educational experience abroad and rank their goals from 1 to 4 in order of importance—1 being the most important and 4 being the least important. Four participants skipped this question. Responses are seen in Table 3, below, with specific courses/academic subjects coming out first with 43.7 percent of respondents selecting this option.

Table 3 — Most important academic goals

	1	2	3	4	Total	Score
I was looking for specific courses/academic subjects	43.7% 135	31.7% 98	15.2% 47	9.4% 29	309	3.10
I wanted to study at a specific school/university	24.8% 78	36.6% 115	29.9% 94	8.6% 27	314	2.78
I wanted to learn/improve my language skills	19.2% 61	26.1% 83	33.6% 107	21.1% 67	318	2.43
Other	15.9% 40	7.6% 19	14.7% 37	61.8% 155	251	1.78

Respondents then shifted their focus to aspects of their study abroad experience
unrelated to academics, such as logistical and cultural issues. Eleven respondents
skipped this question and the rest ranked each from 1 to 12 in order of importance—1
being the most important and 12 being the least important. Looking only at the
categories students ranked as their number one cultural/logistical consideration,
geographic location (22.6 percent), came out as the most popular, followed by better job
prospects in host country (15.8 percent), and cultural attractions/things to do (15.2
percent). Lesser considerations included program cost (11.8 percent) and safety (11.5
percent).

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the importance of career-focused
activities as a part of their study abroad experience. They were given examples of these
activities with the question stating "networking events, workshops or trainings on
interview skills, LinkedIn profile tips, etc.," in parenthesis following the question in
order to clarify and contextualize their answer. Eight people skipped this question and
just over three quarters of respondents (75.4 percent) said these activities were either

very important or important with results summarized in Figure 5, below. These

findings again support Knowles' theory that adults learn best when the topic is of

immediate value or relevance (Knowles, 1970) as these experiences can be immediately

applied to one's job and the experience and additional skills gained would be attractive

to potential employers.

Figure 5 — Feelings about internships or career-focused activities
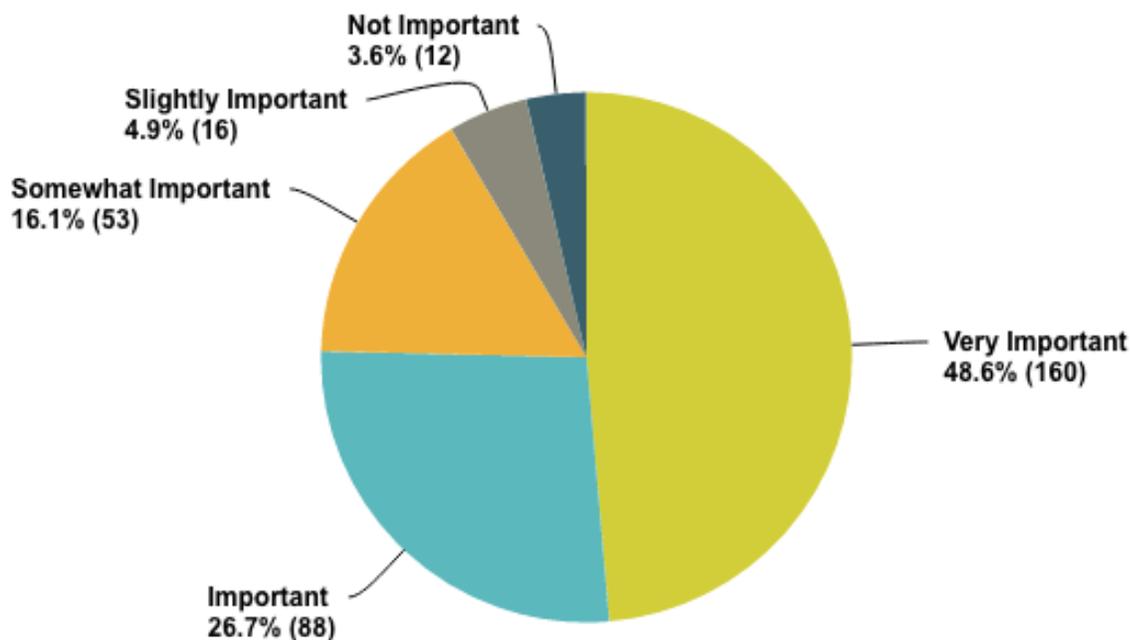
Finally, survey respondents were invited to share their thoughts and reflections,

specifically if they would do anything differently regarding their study abroad

decision-making process and any other comments they wished to share. This prompted

an open-ended response and 160 participants chose to skip this question. Twelve

responses were deemed unusable leaving 166 viable responses. Those that submitted

answers that could be grouped into more than one category were counted once for each

relevant category. After extracting and coding overarching themes within the 177 responses, the following trends were identified and appear below the analysis in Figure 6, below.

Since this question was open ended there was significant variation in responses. Most responses spoke to students' decision-making process, as requested, however some students instead took this opportunity to discuss what they would have done differently while on their program abroad. Because all of this information is useful in understanding important aspects of an international student's experience abroad, all usable responses were included.

Although 13.9 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with their decision-making process and would not change any aspect of it, the vast majority of respondents said they would do something differently if they could go back and make their decision to study abroad over again. The most frequent response (23.7 percent) was that they wished they had gotten more information prior to making a decision, in other words they wished they had spent more time researching and understanding specific aspects of the experience prior to arriving in the United States. Commonly cited examples of information they wished they had looked into further were: details on funding their program, visa processes, affordable or more convenient housing options, instructor qualifications, internship opportunities, and cost of living. One respondent stated, "Carefully research the cost of living, I partially did this and luckily the cost of where I was living, including housing, was very reasonable. Also, I relied on outdated information from my British university and did a lot of own research. I would encourage others to research as much as possible before picking a university to study abroad at."

Just over eighteen percent of respondents wished they had applied to other programs or universities. Some simply wanted to apply to additional programs to have more options to consider before making a final decision, some mentioned wishing they had applied to a specific university they had passed over, others were regretful they had not paid more attention to university ranking, and some wished they had applied to programs that offered more in terms of their expectations. Other respondents expressed a desire for more challenging coursework or simply more classroom diversity, with one stating a desire to "Register in courses where I'm with students from other countries than mine."

Although not necessarily part of their initial decision-making process, 10.4 percent of respondents talked specifically of regret that they did not put more time into networking or socializing as part of their program experience. This often coincided with a feeling that doing more of this would have meant making more local friends, developing a deeper understanding of local culture, and improving their overall experience in various ways through stronger social and professional connections. Similarly, 8.7 percent of respondents mentioned wishing they had participated in an internship or career-building component, some specifically mentioning a desire to apply and participate in Optional Practical Training (OPT), a government issued work authorization for international students that participate in a program for 12 months or more. Said one respondent, "I did not take the internship option, I think it was a mistake since it could help me to work in U.S. company and to learn how people really work there. I could have learned new ways of thinking about work." Other respondents expressed dissatisfaction with internship options available and wanting something different.

Seven-and-a-half percent of respondents wished that they had done something sooner, either sooner in their decision-making process, or sooner after they arrived in the United States. Respondents mentioned having the experience "earlier in life" or "much earlier in my career." 6.9 percent of respondents said they'd weigh geographic location more heavily in their decision. "At first I think the college itself is the most important, now if I have the chance to make my decision again, I'll chose the college in a better area (including larger urban area, more convenient in transition, more liberal people, etc.)." Those that cited wanting a different location often wanted more to do and see; some wanted more cultural diversity and a more welcoming environment for international students, while others wished they chose to live in a place with more Americans to be able to have full immersion and improve their language skills. Finally, 5.8 percent of respondents wished they had made more of an effort in an area not previously mentioned, such as studying more or working harder in class, while 4.6 percent said they wished they had stayed longer in the United States. Results are displayed below.

Figure 6 — What would you do differently regarding your study abroad decision-making process?
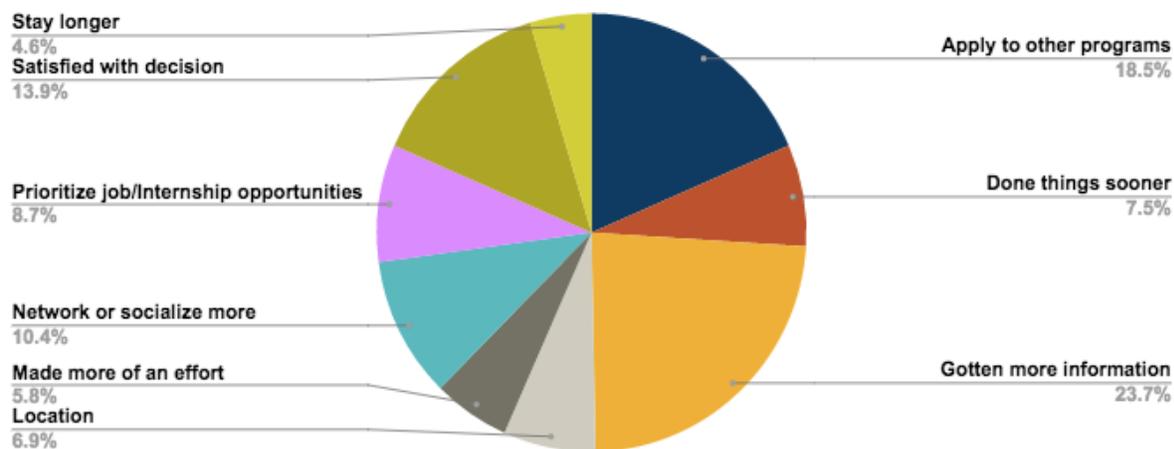

International Agent Survey

In addition to the more extensive student survey, a 10-question online survey was also sent out to 91 educational agents who recruit students for educational experiences abroad. Survey responses were received from 17 of those agents. Data from this smaller-scale group was meant to add an additional, professional perspective on student attitudes alongside the more comprehensive sample size obtained for the student survey. To encourage a higher number of survey responses, not all questions were marked as required; the number of skipped responses for a particular question, if applicable, is noted. It is important to note that the percentages here represent a much smaller number of people as compared to the student survey, and should be weighed accordingly.

Agents were first asked how the majority of students they work with first hear about their agency or services. The top responses were friend or family member (29.4 percent) and Internet search (17.6 percent). An equal number of respondents (11.8 percent) selected website advertising, Google advertising, or "other," as shown in

Figure 7, below. The two agents that selected "other" both described students hearing
about them through their university or institution.

Figure 7 — How students hear about agents or related services
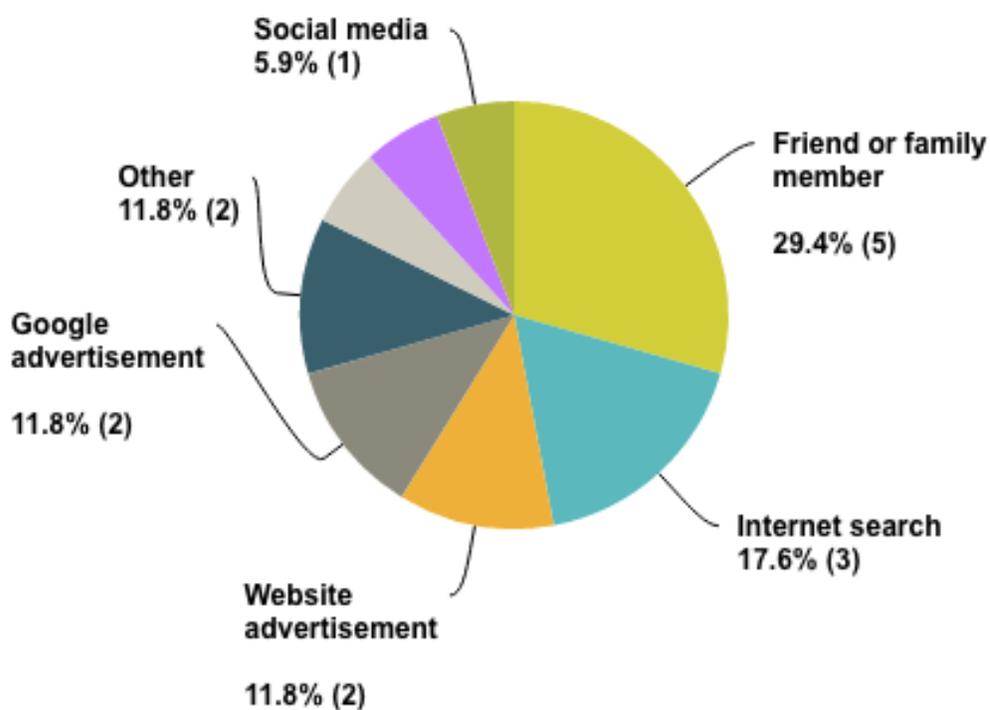
In order to get a sense for where agents might be basing their recruiting efforts,
they were asked to identify the country where they live, as shown in Table 4. The
majority of respondents were from India, with countries in South America, Asia, and
Europe represented as well. One respondent lived in the United States.

Table 4 — Agent country

Answer Choices	Responses	
India	17.65%	3
Brazil	11.76%	2
China	11.76%	2
France	11.76%	2
Japan	11.76%	2
Republic of Korea	11.76%	2
Argentina	5.88%	1
Colombia	5.88%	1
Spain	5.88%	1
United States of America	5.88%	1
Total		17

Agents were then asked to name the number one and number two most popular destination countries for their students. Overwhelmingly 75 percent selected the United States as the number one most popular country amongst students, with Canada (47.1 percent) as the most commonly cited second choice.

Agents were then asked to select the academic level of the majority of their students. The majority of respondents (47.1 percent) work with undergraduate university students, with the remaining divided evenly between high school, graduate students and working professionals. Next, when asked *how* they communicate with these students during an initial conversation, 41.2 percent of respondents stated this conversation happens via telephone, while 23.5 percent each stated it happens in person or online, such as through a system such as Skype, WhatsApp, etc., as demonstrated in Figure 8, below.

Figure 8 — Communication methods: first conversation with a student
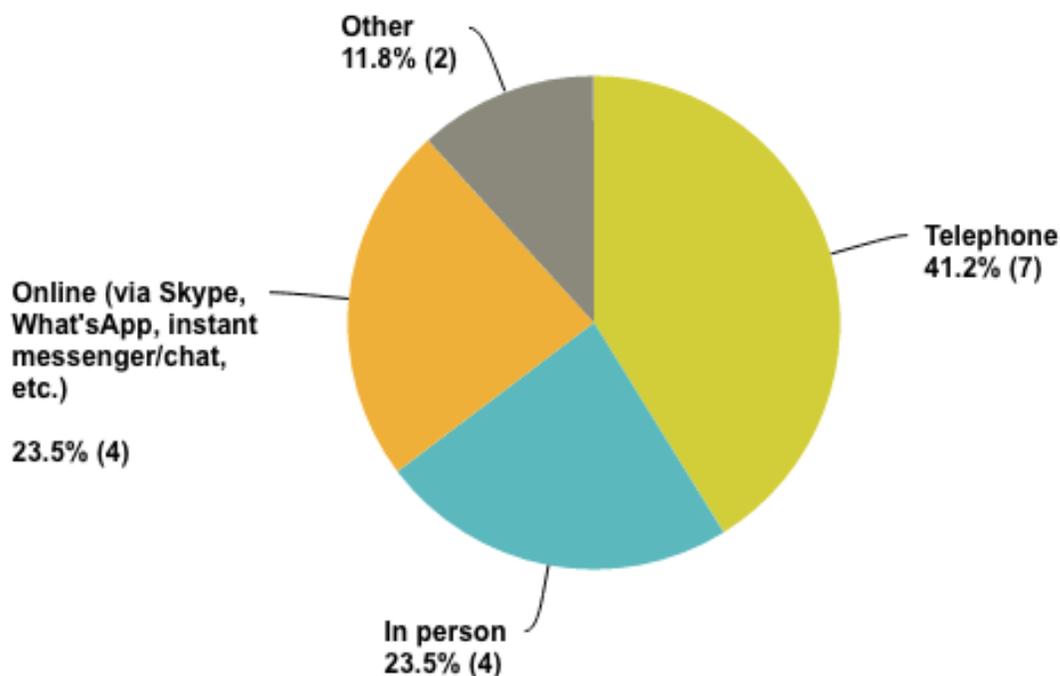
Agents were also asked the most popular academic subject of study amongst their participants. Like in the student survey, business (42.9 percent) was the most popular response. When asked the most popular university or school requested by students, the results were varied, but the largest proportion of respondents (36.4 percent) mentioned requests for University of California (UC) schools in general, or for a specific school in the UC system, most likely due to the fact that all agents participating in this survey had a familiarity and existing connection to the UC system.

International agents then responded to two of the same questions that were posed in the international student survey—to rank the most important *academic* goals (from one to four) for students thinking about studying abroad, as well as the most important *logistical and cultural* factors (from one to twelve), drawing from their work with students. The category ranked most frequently as the number one academic factor

was the same that was reflected in the student survey: specific courses or academic subjects (57.1 percent).

In terms of logistical and cultural factors, looking only at the categories agents ranked the number one cultural/logistical consideration, 33.3 percent selected geographic location, followed by better job prospects in host country (28.6 percent). These were the same selections and the same order as appeared in the student survey. 15.4 percent of agents then selected cost of living in host country. Comparing agent versus student responses to this question is interesting because although both cited geographic location and better job prospects as top factors, agents cited costs as a higher priority, while students cited cultural attractions as an important consideration. This could suggest that since agents work closely with parents as well as the student, they may field more questions about cost and funding, while a student's first thought might be focused instead on the overall program experience and what they will do for fun.

When asked how important internships or career-focused activities (networking events, workshops or trainings on interview skills, LinkedIn profile tips, etc.) are for their students, one agent skipped this question. Responses were: very important (43.8 percent), somewhat important (37.5 percent), and important (18.8 percent). The percentage of agents that said this was very important or important (62.6 percent) was slightly lower than that reported by students (75.4 percent).

Finally, agents were asked to note any other information they felt useful to understand their students and what they are looking for in an international experience. Eight agents skipped this question and nine responded. A few themes were repeated in open-ended responses noting students were often looking for academic quality, rankings, affordability, internships, and return on investment in the form of employability and jobs after graduation. One agent remarked, "Most of the students

think the cost, the ranking of the universities and the research and internship

opportunities are the most important. They don't usually care about other things but it

is not that it's not important for them. It is because they don't know actually it's

important. They usually realize it later after the program."

Data Analysis

The research sought to find the primary factors and motivations that influence

UC Berkeley Extension and other international students to choose educational

experiences in the United States. Analyzing the data, several trends emerged that help

to shed light on this topic. When asked what they would change as part of their

decision-making process, the highest proportion of international student survey

respondents (23.7 percent) reported a desire for more information prior to making their

decision to study abroad, suggesting this is an area that must be reexamined and

improved as a key component of successful international student recruitment. Students

that responded to this question specifically cited wanting more details on funding their

program, visa processes, affordable or more convenient housing options, instructor

qualifications, internship opportunities, and cost of living. When ranking the most

important (non-academic) factors when choosing a program, students cited geographic

location and better job prospects most frequently, followed by cultural

attractions/things to do. The UC Berkeley Extension agent focus group highlighted

similar information as the biggest student influences, suggesting information like "tips

about the city and the university system" and "feedback from alumni" "scholarship

opportunities" as some of the most influential pieces of information for international

students. Multiple agents cited "pictures and videos" or other "audiovisual

information" be made available via "interactive websites" to convey information to
students in the most exciting way.

This data points to that fact that an integral part of international student
recruitment is informing students more effectively, and better highlighting the aspects
of the study abroad experience that are most important to them. It is safe to assume that
all major U.S. schools and programs that recruit international students have websites,
yet it may behoove them to put additional resources into transforming a text heavy
website into one that uses images and videos more effectively and think of new ways to
convey important information in a way that students are more likely to consume. In this
vein, it may also be helpful for schools to use multiple communications tools in tandem
to ensure students who have different preferences in how they access information have
multiple options for obtaining it. For example, approximately 41 percent of agents use
the telephone for their first conversation with students and 23.5 percent do so in person
or online, using tools such as Skype, WhatsApp, etc. Online tools like these that
facilitate real time conversation may be harder to ignore and thus more effective
compared to an email or print information, for example. Therefore, it may be helpful for
U.S. institutions to explore wider use of these methods to reach international students
and ensure they get important questions answered before they make their final decision
on where to study abroad. Lastly, it is important to examine the different people that
students are approaching to seek information on study abroad experiences, or simply
whose opinion they weigh the most heavily in their decision making. After all,
according to WES, 67 percent of students consult family and friends to obtain
information (Choudaha et al., 2012) and student survey data obtained for this paper
found close to one third (31.8 percent) of respondents found out about their program
through a friend or family member. 29.4 percent of agents surveyed cited friends or

family members as the primary way that students found out about agent services, also discussing the importance of alumni video testimonials in exciting students about a particular program. UC Berkeley Extension focus group data also points to professors as holding a place of influence in recommending programs to students particularly from Asian countries. Combined, this data demonstrates the importance of making a concerted effort to disseminate educational program information via multiple platforms as well as forming partnerships and relationships with proven student influencers. People such as family, friends, and professors serve as respected resources while students weigh their options and help them to make the important decision on where to study abroad.

Conclusions

This research sought to answer the question: *What are the factors and motivations that influence UC Berkeley Extension and other international students to choose educational experiences in the United States?* The research conducted provides a snapshot of international students, with European, Brazilian, and Chinese graduate-level students, age 22-30 representing the majority of responses. The age and academic levels represented show that many students have had prior schooling and therefore are likely more intentional and focused in terms of their programmatic goals. In order to find the right program to meet their goals they seek out information, primarily from websites, in order to get informed on program options. It is *people*, however, such as family, friends, agents, and professors that also prove influential in student decision making and were shown to be the primary way students first find out about particular study abroad opportunities.

These students, most of whom are studying subjects like finance, business and computer science, look first for the course or academic subject that they are interested in, but also closely consider factors such as the specific school or university they want to attend. Student's academic goals do not tell the whole story, however. Studying abroad is a holistic living-learning experience that requires a great deal of time and financial investment. Therefore factors like geographic location (the specific country/region/state) and return on investment—how the experience will improve job prospects in the host country—are very much on the minds of students when making their decision. As repeated throughout the literature and survey findings, job and potential career prospects are of great significance to international students, with career-focused activities and career services (Roy et al., 2016) shown to be quite important to this group.

Research Design Limitations

There are limitations inherent in the research design. One is the sample size of both students and agents surveyed, which do not necessarily represent the views of wider audiences. In addition, by exploring data exclusively taken from international students that have participated in or are currently participating in educational programs outside their home country, the data and findings are not entirely objective. Data from this group assumes an existing perception of international experiences as useful as well as access to financial resources or at least the social capital to know how to obtain educational funding (scholarships, fellowships, etc.) to make study abroad possible. Having surveys intentionally go out to students from different socioeconomic strata, others who have not yet studied abroad but would like to, and even students who express a bias against studying abroad would provide a more holistic and representational perspective on what international students really think.

Another limitation is that surveys were sent out exclusively through online channels commonly used in the United States, versus abroad. Many of these channels were also specific to UC Berkeley or UC Berkeley Extension, including the agent pool surveyed. As a result, responses seem to be skewed towards students and professionals that may be familiar with the University of California system and UC Berkeley Extension programming. This misses an important international perspective from students who attended other institutions and have returned to their home countries who could not be reached via the social media or email lists used to recruit participants for this study.

Finally, an additional research limitation was the preponderance of multiple choice and close-ended questions in both online surveys. This was done to encourage ease of use and wide participation in the surveys, however they do not allow for the type of detail, background, and nuance that open-ended questions or other methods like interviews would yield.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the process of exploring international student decision making, new questions arose that merit further inquiry. From several sources in the literature review as well as the online surveys, it is clear that career-focused programming is important to today's international student. However further research can be done to explore what types of career counseling and career services would be most useful for international students. This includes finding out what particular skills would be the most translatable to global settings, as well as what sorts of online tools and methods are most widely used outside of the United States in order to find jobs, particularly in countries that send larger numbers of international students.

Another related question that would be useful to explore is to ask international students themselves how and where would they market their program if they were to serve as alumni ambassadors for their program or were hired by the university to recruit students in their country. What would motivate them to serve as said ambassadors? What would be most helpful to develop their skills in this area? Soliciting students perspectives may reveal important and overlooked information that could be key to making use of alumni as an important resource to spread the word in their own communities about seeking educational opportunities in the United States.

Although challenging, it would be useful to conduct longer-term studies that aim to quantify the impact of study abroad on international students, examining key indicators such as impact on career development, social and intercultural skills, etc.

When students were asked what they would change about their experience, one of the top responses (18.5 percent) was the desire to apply to a different program. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine student expectations of coursework and academics in more detail—what makes them feel like they are learning and productive in terms of their classroom experience. A more nuanced understanding of what makes the experience worthwhile or disappointing to students could lead to identifying programmatic changes that would make a positive impact for students, or perhaps simply describing the experience more effectively in order to manage student expectations.

Practical Applicability

The results of this inquiry may benefit international educators as well as institutions of higher education, principally in the United States, that are interested in learning more about international students. Many international educators today come from backgrounds in languages, humanities, or the arts; yet in order to more effectively

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promote the continued growth in numbers of both outbound study abroad students and inbound international students coming to the U.S. (IIE, 2016a), there is a need for international educators to add a business and marketing approach to these liberal arts skillsets. Examining what motivates students to study outside their home country will ensure that educators approach and support international students in a way that aligns with actual student needs and priorities. Those working on campuses in global and international offices or for independent program providers would benefit from incorporating this data into their strategic marketing, and understanding how to engage students through more relevant programming and effective recruitment models. This data will also help international educators make a case to higher ups that new strategies or innovative programming may be successful amongst international students.

In the midst of the global political climate of 2017 there are many challenges that international educators face in convincing international students to study at their institution. Whether it's increasing restrictions faced by visitors to the United States, the high cost of living and higher education, or the multiple hurdles of a very confusing visa process (Ortiz, 2015), international students face real concerns and potential barriers to coming to the United States. Amidst the challenges, data about how to reach international students can be leveraged to encourage participation in a life-changing international education experience in the United States—a country that offers some of the greatest institutions of higher learning in the world.

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APPENDIX A

International Student Survey

You have been selected to participate in a research study about how international students decide to participate in study abroad experiences. This study is being conducted by Rebecca Lubitz-Marchena from the International Education Master's Program at the School for International Training Graduate Institute (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont. My aim as a researcher is that this data can be used to help international education professionals improve the international student experience in the United States.

You are asked to participate in this research if you are an international student that has taken part in an educational experience in the United States. The process is simple and requires that you give approximately 5-10 minutes to complete an anonymous, online survey consisting of 12 questions.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to decline participation. At any point you have the right to withdraw your participation by choosing not to submit the survey. By completing the online survey, you are recognizing your willingness to participate in a research study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Sora Friedman, PhD., Professor and Chair of International Education at SIT via email at sora.friedman@sit.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time in helping us understand international students!

1. Please select your country of origin (where were you born?)
2. Age at the time of your study abroad experience:

- 18-21
- 22 - 25
- 26 - 30
- 31 - 35
- 36 - 40
- 41+

3. What is the name of the school/university you attend(ed) in the U.S.?

4. Please tell us your major or area of study while in the U.S.

5. Pick the date range that includes your year(s) of study in the U.S.

- 2017-2012
- 2011-2006
- 2005-2000
- 1999-1994
- Other _____

6. Please choose the statement that best describes your decision to study overseas.

- I wanted to prepare for a graduate program in the United States.
- Studying in the U.S. will improve my career prospects.
- I needed additional education and specific new skills to advance my career.
- I wanted to change my career direction.
- I am completing my undergraduate degree and wanted study abroad experience.
- Other (please describe) _____

7. How did you first find out about study abroad opportunities?

- Friend or family member
- Co-worker or supervisor
- Meeting with educational adviser or agent
- Advertisement on a website
- Advertisement in a magazine
- Other advertisement (Please describe) _____
- In-person educational fair or event
- Internet search

- Social media
- Professor/instructor
- Other _____ (please describe)

8. Please choose the resource or person/people that helped the most with your decision to apply to a program overseas.

- Educational representative/agent
- Former student of the program
- Current student at the school/university
- Professor/instructor at your school
- Professor/instructor/staff at the school you were thinking about attending
- Website program description
- Information on program application process
- Videos or multimedia on website
- Speaking to friends about program
- Speaking to family about program
- Other (please describe) _____

9. Considering the academic aspect of your study abroad experience ONLY, what were your most important goals?

(Please rank the items below from 1-4 in order of importance—1 being the most important to you and 4 being the least important).

- I was looking for specific courses/academic subjects
- I wanted to study at a specific school/university
- I wanted to learn/improve my language skills
- Other _____ (please explain)

10. Considering the logistical and cultural aspects of your study abroad experience ONLY (not academics), what were the most important to you?

(Please rank the items below from 1-12 in order of importance--1 being the most important and 12 being the least important).

- Variety of housing options/choices
- Student services (student advising, etc.)
- Program cost

- Safety
- Cost of living in host country
- Host country's attitude towards international students
- Geographic location (specific country/region/state)
- Cultural attractions/things to do
- Better job prospects in host country
- Ease of getting a visa
- Ability to get permanent residency in host country after study
- Other_____ (Please explain)

11. Choose the statement that best describes how you feel about participating in internships or career-focused activities (for example networking events, workshops or trainings on interview skills, LinkedIn profile tips, etc.) as part of your study abroad experience.

- Very Important
- Important
- Somewhat Important
- Slightly Important
- Not Important

12. We are interested in your thoughts! If you could do it all over again, what's the most important thing that you would do differently regarding your study abroad decision-making process? Feel free to note any other information or comments you would like to share.

Thank you again for your time!

APPENDIX B

UC Berkeley Extension International Agent Survey

This anonymous, online survey consists of 10 multiple-choice questions that will take
approximately ten minutes to complete. The survey was reviewed and approved under
the SIT Graduate Institute IRB board and results will be used for academic research and
to improve future program and recruitment efforts. Results of the study will be
available via publication of the final research paper. Additional questions may be
directed to Sora Friedman, PhD., Professor and Chair of International Education at SIT
at sora.friedman@sit.edu.

Understanding the Agent-Student Interaction

1. The majority of students I work with first hear about our agency or services via (pick
one)
- Friend or family member
- Co-worker or supervisor
- Meeting with educational adviser or agent
- Advertisement on a website
- Advertisement in a magazine
- Other advertisement (Please describe) _____
- In-person educational fair or event
- Internet search
- Social media
- Professor/instructor
- Other _____ (please describe)

2. My country of origin is: _____

3. The most popular destination countries for students I work with are

   Top 2 countries: 1) _____ 2) _____

3. The majority of my clients looking to study abroad are
- High school students
- Undergraduate university students
- Graduate students
- Working professionals
- Other _____

4. My first conversation or meeting with a student is usually
- In person
- Online (via Skype, instant messenger/chat, etc.)
- Over the telephone
- Other _____ (please describe)

What Do Students Want?

5. Think about your everyday work with students and what trends you've observed amongst them. Please list the top two most popular for each category below.

- Most popular academic subjects to study
  - 1.
  - 2.
- Most popular schools/universities requested
  - 1.
  - 2.

6. Considering the student learning/academic aspect ONLY, what are the most important academic goals for students thinking about studying abroad? (Please rank the items below from 1-4 in order of importance—1 being the most important to your students and 4 being the least important).

- They are looking for specific courses/academic subjects
- They want to study at a specific school/university
- They want to learn/improve their language skills
- Other _____ (please explain)

7. Considering the logistical and cultural aspects ONLY (not academics), what are most important to students thinking about studying abroad? (Please rank the items below from 1-12 in order of importance--1 being the most important to your students and 12 being the least important).

- Variety of housing options/choices
- Student services (student advising, etc.)
- Program cost
- Safety
- Cost of living in host country
- Host country's attitude towards international students
- Geographic location (specific country/region/state)
- Cultural attractions/things to do
- Better job prospects in host country
- Ease of getting a visa
- Ability to get permanent residency in host country after study
- Other_____ (Please explain)

8. How important are internships or career-focused activities (for example networking events, workshops or trainings on interview skills, LinkedIn profile tips, etc.) for your students?

- Very Important
- Important
- Somewhat Important
- Slightly Important
- Not Important

Your Expertise

As an expert in the field of international education we are interested to hear your thoughts. Please note any other information or clarification you feel would be useful to understand your students and what they are looking for in an international experience.

Thank you again for your time!