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**NAVIGATING THE NECESSARY EVILS: CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC OF
SUSTAINABILITY IN STUDY ABROAD**

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A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Sustainable
Development at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

May 2022

Advisor: Joseph Lanning, PhD, Assistant Professor/Chair of Development Practice

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Literature Review.....	4
History.....	4
Present Day	6
Stakeholders	10
Perception and Benefits.....	11
Research Design and Methodology	15
Sampling and Methods.....	15
Data Analysis	17
Researcher Competence and Positionality	18
Results.....	19
Perception.....	19
Student Impact.....	19
Shifting focus.....	20
Others.....	20
Negotiation	22
Relative Impact.....	22
Intentionality & Community Engagement	23
Conceptualization.....	24
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).....	24
Curricular Integration & Educational Opportunities	25
Collaboration	26
Implementation.....	26
Higher Education Institutions	27
Provider Organizations	29
Professional Associations	30
Barriers	32
Staff Time and Size	33
Lack of Impactful Engagement	33
Other	34
Future Ideas	35

Discussion	36
Focus on Student Outcomes	36
Disparate Effort	38
Relative Impact	39
Reasons for Implementation.....	40
Directions of Future Research	44
Conclusion	46
References.....	49
Appendix A: Interview Invitation Email	54
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	55

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: List of participant organizations and numbers by stakeholder type.....16

Abstract

Travel is a defining feature of education abroad, instrumental in exposing students to experiences and countries beyond their campus community. The cultural exchange implied in travel aspires to benefit both host communities and students' home institutions. However, education abroad has negative environmental impacts incongruent with many sustainability efforts. The education abroad sector aims to address this reality by advancing the use of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in program design and execution. In this study we conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of higher education institutions, third-party study abroad providers, and professional associations to assess how stakeholders perceive this incongruity and implement sustainability initiatives in programming. Results suggest a consciousness of this contradiction, yet the sector lacks a mechanism to enforce practices that reduce the field's negative global impact. Efforts are inconsistently implemented, lacking a co-created policy and metrics to assess the environmental impacts or reciprocal benefits for host communities.

Keywords: sustainability, study abroad, qualitative research, student mobility, international education, education abroad

Introduction

This capstone research project asks how stakeholders in the study abroad field negotiate issues of sustainability in their efforts to encourage and support students at United States-based institutions in their international education experience. While there are varied definitions of the term *sustainability*, for the purposes of this study the concept is defined as the effort to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” as it relates to the environment, social sustainability, sensible economics, and the interconnectedness of all these domains (Brundtland, 1987; Caradonna, 2014). Using an ethnographic methodology, this research explores how sustainability, as defined above, is perceived and negotiated at the higher education institution (HEI), third-party study abroad provider organization (PO), and professional association (PA) (i.e., nonprofit organizations dedicated to study abroad and international education) levels; how sustainability initiatives are conceptualized versus how they are implemented; and what barriers exist to widespread consideration and implementation of these practices in the study abroad field. Given the inherent interdependence of environmental, economic, and social issues, this study also uses an assemblage approach to consider society and nature as connected, complex, ontological domains (Spies & Alff, 2020, p. 5). It is important that sustainability in study abroad not only address the obvious environmental impact of the field, but also the ways in which those environmental changes have social and economic interdependencies that cannot be separated and may fluctuate or change with time.

Over the last two decades, human impact on the planet has resulted in severe environmental degradation and climate change, forcing humankind to come to terms with the finitude of our natural resources (COP26 Explained, 2021; DiMento & Doughman, 2007). At the same time, the world has experienced a series of unprecedented phenomena including a global

pandemic and a racial equality reckoning, forcing humankind to consider issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in deep and substantive ways (*Impact of COVID-19*, 2021; Sugrue, 2020). As a result, global focus has shifted to implementation of sustainability initiatives and acknowledgement of the importance of a more sustainable future, not only in an environmental sense, but also as the concept relates to power, privilege, and equity. However, the study abroad industry has only just begun to consider its role in influencing and developing sustainability practices and mindsets for students engaged in higher education studies (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2021a). While the value of study abroad is evident, there are inherent contradictions to the practice as it exists today.

The study abroad industry sits at a pivotal place between higher education and international travel, providing students with life-changing and academically enriching experiences and fostering global awareness, perspectives, and international exchange (Hopkins, 1999, p. 1). As such, the field of study abroad is “uniquely positioned for its potential to influence change” in the field of sustainability as it relates to the intersection of environmental, societal, and economic needs and global human mobility (NAFSA, 2021). Although more HEIs begin to focus on green initiatives and social justice issues each year, international education and study abroad are on a precipice of a non-negotiable need to meet the next generation’s desires for a sustainable future and sustainable educational options. All international education and study abroad must address the dilemma of determining how to provide students with access to impactful international experiences through ecological and socially aware study abroad programming (NAFSA, 2021). Given the inherent environmental and social impact of study abroad, this conflict proves challenging to address. Therefore, this study seeks to provide an

explanation of the ways in which diverse study abroad stakeholders negotiate and address issues of sustainability within their work to determine a clearer path forward for the industry.

This research will create a broader impact by collecting more comprehensive insights on the diversity of perspectives of sustainability throughout the study abroad field. In so doing, the field will be better equipped to communicate about, navigate, and innovate around the inevitable complexities of sustainability in study abroad. Given the inherent negative impact of the primary activity of study abroad (travel), developing and implementing solutions for sustainability issues can be very challenging. This project will contribute to the development of a blueprint for the improvement of sustainability efforts in the study abroad field, informing study abroad practitioners at various organizational levels in their pursuit of study abroad programming that is attractive and beneficial to a new generation of students. The study will advance knowledge in the field regarding the perceptions and implementation methods surrounding sustainability methods at three key stakeholder levels. At the same time, this study seeks to influence the future of study abroad as an important and arguably essential part of the higher education experience. This capstone begins with a review of relevant literature on the topic of study abroad and sustainability and identifies gaps in the research. This is followed by an explanation of the research design, sampling, and methodology. Research findings are then presented thematically as they correspond to themes related to the research questions as identified in participant interviews. Finally, the capstone concludes with a discussion of the findings, suggestions for future research, and recommendations for the study abroad field.

Literature Review

History

To begin to understand the state of the modern study abroad sector in terms of its goals, practices, and outcomes, it is important to understand the history of the field beginning with the

first student to travel international for their education. While humans have traveled the globe for thousands of years conducting various versions of cultural exchange and learning, historians generally grant the title of “first international student” to Emo of Friesland, a Dutch student who traveled from the Netherlands to study at Oxford in England in the year 1190 (Pepper, 2016). This experience was quite uncommon, especially for people who were not part of the ruling elite given the general challenges of life in the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, Emo’s study abroad journey paved the way for students in future years to study abroad. In the coming centuries, educational exchange was promoted by leaders like Napoleon and Swiss diplomat Emmerich de Vattel who touted the benefits of exchange for “the betterment of individual societies” for the “peace and security of all” (Lee, 2019).

In the 20th century, following the conclusion of World War I, American isolationism was in decline and colleges, religious groups, and peace-building organizations began thinking of ways to increase knowledge of the world beyond U.S. borders (Lee, 2015). These efforts focused primarily on Europe and engaging students in cultural experiences and foreign language learning (United State Institute of Peace, 2018) and were led by the Institute of International Education (IIE) (established in 1919) and the University of Delaware, the implementer of the first for-credit study abroad program (Lee, 2019). Throughout the 20th century study abroad opportunities expanded and diversified with the introduction of reciprocal exchanges between the U.S. and Czechoslovakia and programs for U.S. students to Russia, China, and Argentina (Lee, 2015).

The end of the Second World War ushered in another era for study abroad, this time with a focus not only on inter-cultural understanding but also peace and coexistence (United States Institute of Peace, 2018). In 1946, President Harry Truman established the Fulbright Program, a partnership between the United States and more than 160 countries worldwide that offers

“international educational and cultural exchange programs” for students, scholars, artists, teachers, and professionals of all backgrounds (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2022). Since its inception, nearly 400,000 people have participated in the program (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

As the world headed into the Cold War Era in the 1950s, opportunities for education abroad expanded with greater emphasis on increasing world peace (Lee, 2015). While emphasis remained on European countries, this era saw expansion into Africa, Asia, and South America as well. As the Cold War “challenged the U.S.'s previous understandings of international relationships,” citizens became more motivated to educate themselves on technology, economics, the environment, and politics (Lee, 2015). This era also saw the development of the Peace Corps in the early 1960s, which, while it was not a ‘study abroad program’ per se, was centered in similar ideas of increasing cultural awareness while adding a development component (Bennet, 2010, p. 4). Despite the introduction of more government-funded programs and the expansion of study abroad opportunities, the field saw a loss of funding and decreased attention overall during this period (Lee, 2015).

This brief historical overview depicts how the concept of study abroad has long been centered in the Global North, focusing the goals and objectives of international education within the broader ambitions of Western nations. This has affected the ways in which the study abroad success and impact of study abroad has been measured and evaluated over the years and may explain why sustainability measures have not been broadly addressed and implemented.

Present Day

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, study abroad programs in the United States and around the world provided students with immersive and impactful educational experiences. From academic year (AY) 1989/90 which saw approximately 70,000 U.S. students studying abroad to

AY2018/19 that saw nearly 350,000 U.S. students studying abroad, the field has grown by 390% (IIE Open Doors, 2021c). Of the U.S. students studying abroad during AY18/19, 306,141 were pursuing their undergraduate degree and an additional 38,120 students were pursuing non-credit experiential programs which included activities such as internships, volunteering, and research (IIE Open Doors, 2021b). The most traveled-to host region for U.S. students during AY18/19 was Europe, followed by Latin America & the Caribbean, and Asia (IIE Open Doors, 2020). Only 0.6% of U.S. students who studied abroad in 2018/19 traveled within North America and therefore did not require extensive travel from their home institution across an ocean or to another continent (IIE Open Doors, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the study abroad field, resulting in a 53% decline in the number of students studying abroad for academic credit in AY2019/20 (IIE Open Doors, 2021c). This drastic decrease in student mobility has resulted in ripple effects throughout the field, with institutions reporting financial losses that could total \$100,000 or more (NAFSA, 2020, p.3). Financial impacts have also had implications on study abroad staff. NAFSA's Financial Impact Survey (2020) reports that 79% of the 273 institutions surveyed had between one and ten people involved in managing and supporting education abroad programs (p. 4). 18% of those institutions reported that the financial impacts would likely be result in changes in staffing (positions eliminated, staff furloughed, hours reduced, etc.) at their institutions (NAFSA, 2020, p. 4). As the pandemic continues and mitigation options such as masks and vaccines become more accessible, study abroad will recommence. The timeline for the so-called 'return to study abroad' remains to be seen and is dependent on individual institutions' policies. The broader impact of the reduction in student mobility on students themselves, the staff who

serve them, and the communities who support students abroad will also be determined as the pandemic continues to progress and hopefully moves to endemic status.

While statistics measuring the study abroad student demographics are common, those measuring sustainability in the field are less common. In 2019, Shields (2019) released the first measurement of the sector's greenhouse gas emissions, stating that from 1999 to 2014, greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) associated with study abroad increased from between 7.24 and 18.96 megatons of CO₂ equivalent in 1999 to between 14.01 and 38.54 megatons (p. 598). As Dvorak et al. (2011) state, "carbon use for study abroad has a negative impact on the stability of the earth's climate, and by extension, on the very cultures and people it seeks to illuminate" (p. 3). Some authors have argued that short-term programs are often significant contributors to the environmental impact of study abroad due to long flights relative to program time and a tendency to travel between multiple destinations and do not provide sufficient time for carbon offsets or other measures to sustainably justify their impact (Hammond, 2020).

Literature on the topic of the environmental impact of international student mobility suggests that higher education institutions are at a crossroads of this issue due to their implicit involvement in systems that rely on a carbon-based, capitalist economy and their status as centers of innovation, knowledge, and technology (Shields, 2019, p. 594). If institutions "aim for students to gain cultural awareness and understand global social inequities, then institutions must accept some responsibility for contributing to climate change and how it negatively impacts the regions where students and faculty visit" (Dvorak et al., 2011, p. 3). Thus, some have begun to consider the ways in which study abroad programming can be made more sustainable. For example, McLaughlin (2020) discusses examples of Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs) through her program "Connecting Humans and Nature through

Conservation Experiences (CHANCE)” at Pennsylvania State University (p. 2). These programs, while short-term in length, focus on the environment and introduce students to valuable sustainability concepts that can help to rationalize the carbon footprint and overall environmental impact of a traveling study abroad program due to the lessons learned and consciousness gained by students (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 11). Ayers (2020) maintains a similar suggestion in his discussion of “Education for Sustainable Development” as a way to produce “transformative learning experiences” and encourage institutions to “promote values of sustainability education” (p. 3). Along those same lines, Dvorak et al. (2011) recommend determining which study programs can be justified despite their environmental impact by measuring the ripple effect made through the information and lessons learned while on-site (p. 146). That way, in these programs, current fossil fuel usage goes towards transitioning to a world where there is less reliance on fossil fuels (Dvorak et al., 2011, p. 146). Once these programs are selected, faculty and staff can take additional steps to make them more sustainable on a local level by eating locally, selecting alternative and/or group transportation methods, and utilizing low-impact, dense lodging (Dvorak et al., 2011).

Another commonly posed solution to the environmental impact of study abroad, namely the air travel it requires, is to purchase carbon offsets. For example, American University (AU) in Washington, DC began offsetting the institution’s study abroad travel in 2017 and achieved carbon neutrality as an institution in 2018. The offsets purchased benefit a project in Kenya (one of AU’s study abroad sites) and assist with the transition from open fire cooking to the use of gas stoves which reduce GHG emissions (Zanella-Litke, 2018). While these types of projects are obvious ways to allow travel for study abroad to take place with seemingly minimal impact, carbon offsetting only leads to a “zero-sum game” rather than decreasing carbon emissions

(Carbon Market Watch, 2019, p. 3). Additionally, helping populations that already have a significantly lower carbon footprint than the average U.S. citizen to lower their impact through offsets simply shifts the onus of effort onto someone else (Carbon Market Watch, 2019, p. 11). Those who take on this burden are often those who are most greatly impacted by the effects of climate change – those of lower socio-economic status who live in vulnerable environments.

Stakeholders

To understand the study abroad field and how it relates to sustainability, it is important to clarify the stakeholders in the field: higher education institutions (HEIs), provider organizations (POs), and professional associations (PAs).

Most students (88%) who studied abroad in AY18/19 were college or university students pursuing their undergraduate degree (IIE Open Doors, 2020). Given this, HEIs are a primary stakeholder in the study abroad field. HEIs' role in study abroad varies from institution to institution; however, their initial function is often making students aware that study abroad is an option to them. Once students have this cognizance, global education offices within HEIs assist students in selecting programs, finding financial aid, facilitating pre-departure orientations, supporting them while abroad, and reintegrating them into campus upon their return (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2021c). International education offices may also offer support to faculty who are designing or leading study abroad programs and liaise with other study abroad stakeholders such as POs. This study focuses on HEIs in their role with U.S. students and faculty, but it is worth noting that their roles frequently expand much further than this.

While HEIs often implement their own study abroad programs, either through international campuses or faculty-led programming, there are also organizations external to HEIs that directly assist with undergraduate student mobility in POs. These organizations focus their work specifically on study abroad program administration. Often, POs manage their own study

abroad centers abroad which host U.S. students for academic courses and provide access to local institutions, homestays, and other programming (IES Abroad, 2021). In these cases, POs may take over the role of an HEI study abroad office and provide other student support prior to, during, and post-program. Some POs also offer custom designed programming for specific courses, topics, and/or faculty. Others also offer international internship opportunities. Given their continual implementation of study abroad programs, these organizations frequently have deep connections to their destinations, offering rich cultural experience and a sense of security in established risk management procedures.

Finally, the field also has several “professional associations” which function in an overarching capacity, serving to educate and support the field. Their role does not involve direct implementation of study abroad programming, but rather professional support for the faculty and staff who work in the field. Most are membership organizations that provide “training and resources to education abroad professionals” (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2021d). Many host large annual conferences that serve as a convening space for international educators from around the world, alongside other regular programming, publications, and support. Their role is to serve as a tool that “equips leaders to shape the future of higher education in a global context” (Rosenbaum, 2021).

This paper will reference each of these institution types in an effort to clarify the ways in which sustainability in study abroad is perceived, negotiated, and acted upon from theory to practice.

Perception and Benefits

Study abroad is often portrayed as a “once in a lifetime experience” that will change students' lives, upending and challenging their beliefs, exposing them to new ideas, and making them into global citizens ready to join the international workforce (Zhang & Gibson, 2021, p. 1).

Students who engage in study abroad travel gain greater intercultural awareness and a deeper understanding of power, privilege, education styles, and culture through experiential learning outside of a traditional classroom (Hopkins, 1999, p. 1). The field utilizes several measurement tools such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Rubrics to evaluate education abroad outcomes (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2021b). These assessment tools are largely focused on student learning outcomes, neglecting to consider the externalities of study abroad, and therefore provide largely positive results on the benefits of international education. Thus, students, particularly those from U.S. institutions, are greatly encouraged to take part in a study abroad program at least once in their academic career. The effort to engage students in study abroad goes so far as to be the focus of more than 34 U.S. Government scholarship and grant programs (USA Study Abroad, 2021).

Many of these scholarships seek to address the inequality previously seen in study abroad because of its being perceived as a luxury available only to those who could afford it in terms of both money and time. Today, program modalities such as short-term programs that take place for between one- and eight-weeks account for more than 60% of study abroad experiences (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 1). Compared to long-term study abroad, short-term programs offer international education opportunities to students who may lack funds or time for extensive program travel, making these experiences more accessible to a greater number of students. According to the 2020 Open Doors report, in AY18/19, 64.9% of students participated in short-term study abroad programs over the summer or on programs lasting eight weeks or less (Open Doors, 2020).

Beyond the duration, location, or type of program, study abroad experiences ultimately provide valuable opportunities for students to engage in reflective practice and experiential learning. When students travel abroad, Hopkins (1999) states that “they inevitably find themselves looking inward as well as outward, reconciling their views of themselves and their cultural assumptions with the new cultural context” (p. 1). This reflective practice of self and external examination “forms an entirely different sense of experiential learning of the most intimate sort, and often leads to dramatic self-development” (Hopkins, 1999, p. 1). Another valuable outcome that the study abroad experience provides for students is the opportunity to emerge as globally minded citizens embodying three key dimensions including “social responsibility (a concern for humanity and the environment), global awareness (alertness and responsiveness to issues that are global in nature), and civic engagement (active, informed participation in local, national, and global affairs)” (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 9).

While the value of study abroad is evident, there are inherent contradictions to the practice as it exists today. The positive perspective on study abroad is largely centered around Western students from generally wealthy nations who are encouraged to venture abroad to experience something new and broaden their horizons both literally and figuratively. However, the glorification of study abroad must confront some substantial contradictions in the age of rapidly expanding climate change effects and drastically increased social and economic inequality.

PAs have sought to provide solutions to the issue of sustainability in study abroad. In 2021, the Forum on Education Abroad released a guidebook titled [*Advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals through Education Abroad*](#) designed to “direct the education abroad sector toward social, economic, and environmental sustainability” by connecting the organization’s

Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2021a). Since their development in 2015, the number and type of industries that have begun to utilize the SDGs as a framework for their own work to assist in the achievement of these goals. In higher education, the SDGs have been used to “define learning objectives and content, introduce pedagogies to empower learners, and [integrate] sustainability policies and strategies into their management structures” (Saxena et al., 2021, p. 1). However, the SDGs are frequently criticized in the development field with opponents citing the goals as being unrealistic, ambiguous, not time-bound, and at times counteracting one another (Saxena et al., 2021, p. 5). The Forum’s guidelines use the SDGs, which are stated to be “a critical pathway to assuring the long-term maintenance and enhancement of human well-being in light of finite planetary resource,” to align education abroad practices with those that promote social, economic, and environmental health (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2021a). The guidelines offer educators suggestions around administrative frameworks, equity, diversity, and inclusion, student learning, ethics, and partnerships with the SDGs’ broader goals at their core.

While the proposed solutions to the issue of study abroad’s environmental impact is relatively substantial, there is a noticeable focus on the environmental piece of sustainability and a lack of focus on the assemblages and externalities of study abroad. Although the setting of study abroad experiences, especially those that are focused on environmental sustainability will likely result in the study of topics related to economic and social sustainability, there remains a lack of discussion about the broader impacts of study abroad and how these impacts can be addressed in concrete and effective ways. There are obvious negative externalities to flying around the world, and while the positive impact is great for those students who engage in the

opportunity, there is inevitable negotiation to be done around how the study abroad field can reconcile its negative and positive impacts.

Research Design and Methodology

Sampling and Methods

To determine how stakeholders in the study abroad field negotiate issues of sustainability in their efforts to encourage and support students at United States-based institutions in their international education journey, this research was conducted through virtual, recorded key informant semi-structured interviews taking place over the course of two months. Participants came from a variety of organizations and institutions – including professional associations, higher education institutions, and third-party study abroad provider organizations - to capture the breadth of perspectives and experiences within the study abroad field. Sampling key informants from these three key groups generated information regarding study abroad sustainability initiatives from theory to practice. Participants granted consent to be interviewed by responding to a call for interview participation conducted via email ([Appendix A](#)). They also granted verbal consent at the start of the interview process.

Specific key informants included CEOs, Presidents, Directors of Global Education or Education Abroad, Deans, and Program Coordinators at professional associations, third party study abroad provider organizations, and higher education institutions. These institution types represent those at the forefront of the study abroad field, offering training, examples, innovations, and mentorship to the field at large. By gathering their perspectives, this research has begun to establish a robust picture of where the field stands today and where it may go in the future.

15 informants from 11 institutions/organizations were selected via purposive sampling to ensure that the perceptions of people in leadership positions with ties to study abroad sustainability at these institutions were captured.

Professional Associations	Total Participants: 6
Association 1	2 participants
Association 2	1 participant
Association 3	1 participant
Association 4	2 participants
Third Party Study Abroad Providers	Total Participants: 3
Provider 1	1 participant
Provider 2	1 participant
Provider 3	1 participant
Higher Education Institutions	Total Participants: 6
4-year institution	2 participants
2-year institution	2 participants
4-year institution	1 participant
2-year institution	1 participant

Table 1: List of participant organizations and numbers by stakeholder type

Connections with these leaders were made using the PI’s professional connections in the field as generated through attendance at study abroad-related conferences, through professional networking groups, and via online research. To prevent any ethical violations as a result of connections made through personal relationships or through professional connections to funding organizations such as the U.S. Government or World Learning, the researcher ensured her full biography was provided to each participant and her capacity as a student was clearly stated as the foundation for this research.

The research sought to include two representatives from each institution to create a sample that encompassed both education abroad and sustainability-focused staff. This was achieved at four of the 11 institutions. Two perspectives from each institution/organization was due to either lack of response or scheduling conflicts. Nonetheless, the sample size was feasible to conduct research within during the allotted period and generated diverse responses from a

variety of institution and organization types. Interviews were conducted in English via the virtual meeting software of the participant's preference (Zoom or Microsoft Teams).

Semi-structured interviews were designed to collect data on how a cross-section of institutions perceive and negotiate issues of sustainability in efforts to promote education abroad both directly with students, through programing, or associated institutions, through policy making, trainings, and conferences. Participants were first asked to discuss if and how sustainability was incorporated into their organizations' mission and value statements to examine intentionality. Participants were then asked about institutional practices that tangibly support or promote sustainability, such as employing dedicated staff to sustainability issues or setting and enforcing institutional policies related to sustainability. The interview then explored participants' perceptions on the interactions and power relationships between PAs, HEIs, and POs in moving from theory and policy to practicing sustainability in education abroad. Participants were asked how their institution reconciles the environmental impacts of education abroad travel and how they perceive and measure the social impacts of education abroad for host countries and communities. Interviews concluded by asking about future directions of the field of education abroad relating to sustainability. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of first identifying themes based on both the content of participant responses and themes identified in the literature. Ultimately, responses were sorted into six main themes of negotiation, perception, conceptualization, implementation of sustainability practices, barriers to practicing sustainability in education abroad, and direction of future practice and policy.

Researcher Competence and Positionality

Having grown up during a period when climate change and social justice have come to the forefront as issues facing our nation and the world, sustainability and international education have been of particular interest to me for several years. Following the conclusion of my undergraduate studies, during which I studied abroad for an academic year, I have worked in the international education field as a program administrator for U.S. Department of State-funded exchange programs. I have worked as a Program Officer for the Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) Program since 2018, assisting U.S.-based higher education institution to increase their study abroad capacity through grants and trainings. This role grants me unique access to study abroad stakeholders at diverse HEIs and at POs that influence the field. Having this level of access, while ultimately beneficial to the goals of this research, may have impacted my findings due to my association with the U.S. Department of State, a major source of funding for many of these institutions and organizations.

My engagement with study abroad and higher education through my work and my personal interest in sustainability initiatives led me to pursue a degree in sustainable development from SIT. As a student, I have developed several projects focused on the exploration of sustainability initiatives in the study abroad field, including a short-term research case study of sustainability practices in study abroad programs implemented by SIT Study Abroad. A digital survey of 21 Academic Directors and 14 interviews were conducted to sample the practices and thoughts around the topic and generate a foundation for this capstone research. This prior research case study has set a tone for my understanding of the current state of study abroad and its relationship to sustainability. More generally, I have completed coursework in this degree program with a focus on regeneration, leadership, social change, monitoring and

evaluation, and qualitative research, preparing myself to address the environmental, statistical, and ethnographic objectives of this project.

Results

Considering the limited information available regarding the sustainability and study abroad, interview participants offered a new and enlightening perspective on the ways in which sustainability is perceived, negotiated, conceptualized, and implemented in the field. Their responses are organized under those themes in the sections below, focusing on both common responses as well as outliers.

Perception

Sustainability is a topic rarely broached within the education abroad sector given the inherent changes of developing sustainable programming within a restrictive societal structure. Therefore, prior to discussing ideas around implementation of sustainability initiatives, it was important to establish an understanding of participants' perception of the sustainability within the sector. Participants generally focused their answers on how sustainability relates to student outcomes and impact. They also mentioned a perceived shift in their personal definition of the term sustainability as it relates to their field and work.

Student Impact

When asked to explain their perspective on the issue of sustainability, participants often focused their answer on the students taking part in the study abroad experience. Eight out of fifteen respondents highlighted an emphasis on student learning outcomes in their understanding of sustainability in the field. For example, participant 007, from a PA, stated that while sustainability is one of their institution's top priorities, "[we] are very clear that we believe in the value of student mobility and travel and that it has to be done intentionally while being conscious of the impact that it has on the environment, but it is a worthwhile venture." A participant from a

PO (007) noted, “I think sustainability is very much about... fundamentally the learning experience that the student has.” When asked this question, another PA participant stated:

I think that for a lot of us in the field, it is not about the mobility, it is about the ‘why’, it is about the outcomes, it is about... transformational education, it is about building intercultural competence, and it is about giving students the tools to be able to see things from multiple viewpoints... (Participant 012, February 2022)

An HEI participant (014) made note of two different camps on the issue, positing that some people believe in changing behavior and avoiding negative environmental impacts, while others argue that it is inappropriate to stifle students’ study abroad desires by suggesting alternative, lower-impact programming and/or locations.

Shifting focus

Another emergent theme found in six of the fifteen participant responses spoke to shift in understanding of the term ‘sustainability’ and its definition. A PA participant (013) spoke from a personal perspective noting that their definition of the term “has expanded beyond environmental impact” to encompass the social and economic aspects of sustainability, and more recently the concept of justice and anti-racism. They noted that “you cannot talk about sustainability without also talking about equity,” emphasizing the intersectionality of the issue of sustainability (Participant 013, February 2022). Participant 014, from an HEI, spoke to the broader expansion of interest in DEI efforts across the United States, explaining that “the DEI ethos is alive and well here; a lot of our conversations about climate and study abroad have also incorporated environmental justice considerations.”

Others

While not necessarily common answers, the responses allude to other important perceptions of sustainability in study abroad that may translate into reasons why the issue is not more deeply and widely addressed.

For one, Participant 007, a PO participant, stated that:

there is an assumption that maybe study abroad, and sustainability cannot go together because of the assumption that study abroad involves travel and travel has proven to...create impacts on the environment. But this is reducing all the potential of an international event, it is a national learning experience too. (Participant 007, February 2022)

The participant's quote identifies the idea that perhaps conversations around sustainability in study abroad could be limiting to the field, particularly for those who are resistant to change and do not want to see student mobility practices shift away from the highly impactful traditions. Participant 013 was able to offer a PA perspective on this idea, stating that "there are a large number of study abroad professionals who do not want to talk about sustainability, particularly if we are only talking about environmental sustainability or environmental impact" due to their perception of their job being to engage increasingly high numbers of students in international education opportunities involving travel.

Other participants noted that they perceived their institution's sustainability practices are implemented for reasons other than improving comprehensive sustainability practices. Participant 012 spoke of their association's sustainability practices, noting that they felt like "it is all just kind of lip service" implemented to save money, rather than with the intention to improve sustainability practices. An HEI participant (006) echoed this sentiment, highlighting that "sustainability is a buzzword, and there is kind of some confusion around really what it means."

Finally, bringing up a unique point, participant 010, from a PA, spoke of a "toxic perception that study abroad is better than tourism" that negatively affects the field's ability to develop more socially sustainable practices. They noted that telling students that study abroad experiences can make them into 'locals' "erases the idea of any type of power differential based on geographies and people's backgrounds that they come from. It also provides our students with

some sort of ownership of this new location, and an understanding that they know everything after a couple months” (Participant 010, February 2022).

Negotiation

As established in the literature review, student mobility as part of study abroad programming has an inherent impact on the environments, societies, and economies students interact with. Despite this, stakeholders in the field are pushed to increase the number and diversity of students studying abroad to increase the positive student learning, employment, and general success outcomes that often come out of their participation in these programs. The contrast between the drive to increase student participation and the unavoidable impacts of travel, along with other collocations related to the difference in Western nation’s carbon footprint compared to that of many study abroad destinations, it was important to determine how stakeholders sought to negotiate issues of sustainability within their work. Doing so helps to determine how stakeholders can navigate these issues as they assist students in their international education experiences.

Relative Impact

A primary theme identified among diverse stakeholders when it came to negotiation of sustainability was the idea that study abroad programming’s impact relative to other industries, communities, and institutional practices is considerably less and therefore not an area worthy of direct focus and innovation. Participant 001 who supports community college students at an HEI noted that when asked about negotiating student impact, they question whether their programs’ impact is that substantial, asking themselves, “What is the relative climatic impact of my programs, related to the carbon output of the United States?”. A PA participant noted that their association believes that “by participating in education abroad, [students] are having experiences and gaining skills that will enable them to be part of the [climate change] solution, and so there,

the environmental impact we are hopeful will be worth it in the long run” (Participant 0005, February 2022).

Another participant had more quantitative data to share in this regard, noting that education abroad contributed to only 1.5% of their large, state institution’s total carbon emissions each year (Participant 011, February 2022). Similarly, another participant referred to Robin Shields’ (2019) study of carbon outputs of student mobility, citing that by transferring students from “a high carbon consumptive environment into a lower carbon consumption environment, you are actually having a positive impact in one respect” (Participant 014, February 2022).

Intentionality & Community Engagement

Several participants referred to a focus on intentionality of study abroad programming and being “more intentional about our intended outcomes for students going abroad” (Participant 006, February 2022). One participant from a PO noted that the present COVID-19 pandemic has showcased the importance of global connectivity, noting that:

Climate change doesn't care about national borders, pandemics and viruses don't care about national borders... we don't have the option of retreating and only focusing inward... So, if we're really going to equip students to tackle these problems, we have to help them understand and learn how to work with other people who are different from themselves in many different ways (Participant 013, February 2022)

This idea was supplemented with other ways in which study abroad stakeholders utilize the perceived broader impact of study abroad to negotiate the negative climatic, social, or economic effects.

For instance, three of the fifteen respondents spoke to the community engagement aspects of program design and implementation. A PA participant stated that they are not “an advocate for saying that we should not go to a place because it's going to be environmentally detrimental to them if that community says it's important for us to be able to interact with students and show

them what's happening here” (Participant, 013, February 2022). Another HEI participant noted that their programs are “more meaningful” than those that interact with communities on a superficial level due to their work with a “local community person we have who is sort of facilitating connections to other really impressive contributing members of their community” (Participant 003, February 2022). This notion of intentionality and community engagement represents the potential for a shift in study abroad’s prioritization of student outcomes towards more holistic, community-focused goals.

Conceptualization

After establishing a general idea of how sustainability is perceived and negotiated throughout the field, the research moved on to a discussion of potential solutions to the issues identified. Given that sustainability measures are often not yet implemented, it was important to discuss participants’ ideas around measures that were in the conceptualization stage prior to implementation, allowing them to speculate and think beyond what they may deem ‘realistic’.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In an effort to conceptualize sustainability initiatives, all three organization types featured in this study mentioned the United Nations SDGs as a framework for their own institutions’ thoughts and efforts around sustainability. A PA noted that their work had focused on equity, diversity, inclusion, and ethics for many years and therefore it was logical to engage with the SDGs given how they “bring together all these things that are important to [them] and [their] priorities” (Participant 005, February 2022). Another participant of this same organization stated that the SDGs are a good way “to organize thinking and activity around sustainability and more recently incorporate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion into sustainability” (Participant 013, February 2022).

These ideas around utilizing the SDGs as a basic framework for conceptualization of sustainability initiatives were confirmed by HEI and PO participants. An HEI mentioned that their institution decided to align their programming with the SDGs because they “were not going to come up with new sustainability goals when they are already established” (Participant 003, February 2022). Another HEI participant spoke of an idea they had to introduce faculty to the SDGs so those leaders could incorporate the goals relevant to their faculty-led programs into program design and application and therefore encourage students to learn about and engage with the SDGs (Participant 004, February 2022). A PO participant referenced integrating the SDGs into their program curricula, noting that they had “taken an approach to committing to the UN SDGs” as a broader set of goals that encompassed their institutional and curricular goals as well.

Curricular Integration & Educational Opportunities

Echoing sentiments in the negotiation and perception questions, eight of fifteen participants noted a focus on the educational opportunities of study abroad and how sustainability concepts and ideas could be incorporated into curricula when conceptualizing sustainability initiatives. Offering an overarching view, a PA participant noted:

...thinking about how it is that we can prepare students and have a conversation thinking about global learning as something that's much broader than just the initial travel. How do we get students to be really critical about what it is that they're consuming as well? (Participant 009, February 2022)

Another participant from a PA emphasized a need for educators to “really think about and talk about like what sustainability looks like” while students are in-country in order to provide them with context and ideas they may apply when they return home (Participant 12, February 2022). An HEI participant made note of educators’ “obligation to help students consider the location they are going to, and to be intentional about the learning outcome they we hope students get from their experience” (Participant 006, February 2022). Participant 001 from an

HEI directly stated that their belief was that “the important work has to do with the curriculum and less to do with the mode of transportation” when it came to addressing issues of sustainability in study abroad.

Collaboration

When it came to discussing the conceptualization of sustainability initiatives focused on lessening the social and economic impacts of study abroad programming, six of fifteen participants emphasized a need for collaboration among stakeholders in the field, namely international partners. For instance, an HEI participant stated that “hopefully we are contracting with local organizations” when organizing study abroad programming, rather than utilizing “big study abroad providers” (Participant 006, February 2022). Participant 005, from a PA echoed this sentiment, recommending that program designers “involve colleagues and partners in the Global South as much as possible...sit down with local partners and have really frank conversations about what the program is really doing to their location...”

When speaking about conceptualizing sustainability initiatives for programming in a post-pandemic world, Participant 015 from a PA stated, “One thing that I hope will happen is closer relationships with some of our partners abroad because we will need to work with them on things like in monitoring health and asking questions about what their policies and practices are on things related to sustainability issues in its larger realm.”

Implementation

While conceptual ideas around sustainability initiatives are telling of where institutional and organizational priorities lie, gathering data around the actual implementation of certain initiatives provides the opportunity to compare theory and practice. Discussions around initiative implementation resulted in a marked difference in responses among the three organization types

related to the differing roles HEIs, POs, and PAs can play when it comes to study abroad programming.

Higher Education Institutions

HEIs are “on the ground” in the study abroad field, guiding students throughout their international education journey, designing programs, working with faculty, and much more. They work with study abroad programming in the pre-, mid-, and post-program stages, and are also situated within larger institutions which may have broader sustainability goals and initiatives. Therefore, their implementation of sustainability measures tended to be relatively concrete among interview participants.

Virtual Education Abroad

While the implementation of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programming and other virtual initiatives is not new to the field, its past use has been in an effort to make study abroad more accessible to a greater number of students, for instance those who could not afford to study abroad, or those whose majors would not allow for time away from campus (Cossey & Fischer, 2021, p. 1). Given the halt of all travel because of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual international programming has become much more commonplace in the past two years as it is the only way to engage students internationally (Cossey & Fischer, 2021, p. 3). Thus, institutions like that of Participant 001 have begun to integrate “virtual intercultural programming [such as] collaborative, cross-border exchange” into courses in each of the institution’s schools (February 2022). At this same institution another participant noted the value of virtual exchange as a means of extending the length of study abroad engagements by allowing students to meet and work with their international counterparts for longer than a short-term program may typically allow (Participant 003, February 2022).

Carbon Offsets

A tangible way that many industries, including study abroad, address environmental impact is through the purchase of carbon offsets. While this method is fraught with contradictions, it is still a primary way in which HEIs in the U.S. seek to lessen their environmental impact. Three of the four HEIs interviewed for this study noted that their programs have engaged in carbon offsetting in some way as part of their sustainability efforts. One institution which has adapted an “education, prevention, and mitigation” plan for addressing climate change in their global education office stated that as part of their mitigation efforts, the university is “collecting fees from students who travel abroad” based on the calculated carbon footprint of their travel to purchase carbon offsets on students’ behalf (Participant 011, February 2022). Another institution spoke of a “tree planting initiative” instituted to offset the impact of student flights but admitted that the study abroad office did not have a carbon offset policy embedded in its programs (Participant 001, February 2022). Participant 006 spoke to an institution-wide resolution on “climate conscious travel” that had recently passed, noting that methods of implementation to enforce that resolution had yet to be determined, though they may involve carbon offsets (February 2022).

Provider Use & Community Engagement

A final theme that emerged from HEI participant’s discussion of sustainability initiative implementation was the use of study abroad provider organizations and related community engagement efforts. Similar to the virtual program implementation, utilization of study abroad providers is anticipated to increase among HEIs post-pandemic given their established relationships and risk mitigation capacities, which lessen the burden on HEIs. Doing so may also help to improve sustainability initiatives. A community college participant noted that they:

...cannot imagine doing study abroad without using study abroad provider organizations, to be quite frank. Part of that is the partnership and using local knowledge onsite and calling out inequities and having local expertise. (Participant 004, February 2022)

This idea flows logically from the previous mentions of collaboration and curricular integration in previous sections, speaking to HEIs' efforts to program intentionally as they seek to engage with sustainability and DEI topics across all institutional programs. Another HEI mentioned an alternative to provider use when trying to design programming with local community engagement:

When we were sending students abroad, we were typically establishing those study abroad programs in areas where we already had connections, so it was not just blindly entering a brand-new country and fumbling around and trying to find someone on the ground who could help us. They're typically countries where we have an alumnus...and then they are definitely a huge support when we are on the ground there. (Participant 003, February 2022)

Provider Organizations

Like HEIs, POs are directly implementing study abroad programs, however, these institutions are typically focused on international programming specifically and exclusively rather than having larger institutional initiatives and goals to take into consideration.

Additionally, many providers operate as autonomous non- or for-profit organizations, meaning that there is a business aspect of their work that requires additional thought in terms of sustainability initiative implementation.

Community Engagement & Homestays

Perhaps due to HEIs' focus on community engagement, and the inherent need for POs to partner with HEIs or at least attempt to address their wants and needs, participants from POs frequently spoke of their efforts to engage with local communities in their programming. All three POs interviewed made note of various community engagement initiatives they had implemented to address social and economic aspects of sustainability. Participant 008 mentioned the implementation of regular "community days" where "students are involved in giving back"

to the areas where they are studying abroad. Beyond this, there was a notable emphasis on community engagement through student living accommodations – primarily homestays. For instance, Participant 002 shared that their organization places students in apartments with other local students or places them with a homestay family that “has invited students in because they want to share culture but also because they may need the income that comes with interacting with students”. Another PO participant reiterated this idea, noting that their organization works with “families who are generally interested in the experience” and finds that in some locations the homestays are managed by women in the household and provide a sole source of income for those people (Participant 007, February 2022).

Marketing Materials

As previously mentioned, POs stand apart from HEIs in some regards given that they are autonomous businesses. Therefore, their work requires them to market their programs to HEIs and their students. In the past, these efforts involved staff travel to study abroad fairs at campuses across the country and the production of marketing materials. When asked how their organizations are concretely addressing sustainability issues internally, two of the three POs represented by participants noted an effort to reduce the impact of their marketing initiatives. These efforts largely focused on the printing of catalogues or other paper materials, resulting in organizations shifting to using soy ink or certain kinds of recycled paper (Participant 008, February 2022). Another noted a shift in practice away from physical materials altogether by utilizing QR codes to direct students towards digital resources (Participant 002, February 2022).

Professional Associations

As their title suggests, PAs operate at a higher, more theoretical level than the POs and HEIs that are directly implementing international education programs. These organizations serve POs and HEIs as a hub for resources, trainings, and conferences that focus on international

education initiatives. Therefore, their sustainability efforts focus on practical internal initiatives and assisting the field in more theoretical ways.

Educating the Field

The primary role of PAs is to educate the international education field on best practices, new ideas, and mutually beneficial content sourced from experts and thought leaders around the world. Thus, PAs are the primary way to spread information about sustainability to POs and HEIs alike. Through conferences, webinars, white papers, and online resource hubs, PAs produce content and services “focused on the issues that are relevant to the [field] and that includes topics of community involvement and engagement, equity from a social justice standpoint” and others (Participant 009, February 2022). PAs acknowledge that educating others in the field and developing resources and trainings is the primary way they can impact it (Participant 005, February 2022).

Given that their members are focused on DEI issues, each of the PAs interviewed noted that they have begun to offer professional development and resources on this topic. Participant 012 noted that their association had hosted a webinar specifically on “carbon capture and international education” that was well attended. Another participant noted that they had published guidelines for “advancing the SDGs through education abroad” that was one of the top three most accessed resources on their website in the past year (Participant 005, February 2022).

While this type of programming represents a marked change from past PA foci, it is important to note that participants mentioned their members’ current primary focus is on DEI initiatives over sustainability initiatives, resulting in their programming focusing primarily on that topic.

Marketing and Conferences

In the same way that POs have a substantial environmental footprint related to marketing materials, as do PAs, particularly related to the large annual conferences and other events they host. Therefore, each participant from the four associations interviewed noted marketing and conferences as an area where they have sought to implement sustainability initiatives. These initiatives take several forms. Some participants noted that for 2022 conferences extra thought was being given to “the products [they] buy and how they are sourced, and who does the work to produce them” in an effort to utilize more sustainably made goods and services, despite their typically higher cost (Participant 005, February 2022). Participant 012 stated the following, emphasizing a shift in mindset around conference “swag”:

We have decided this year not to print our [conference] program, as we always have done in the past; it’s this big book. People are going to flip out when they find out that it's just on the app. But we are reducing a ton of what we normally mail to [the conference] ... We used to feel like we were so great that we give out the water bottles and tote bags...but at this point we all have plenty of water bottles, we do not need any more. (February 2022)

Other examples that emerged during the interviews also sought to address the carbon footprint of traveling to convene at the conference themselves. This and the pandemic have caused certain associations to rethink their events and transition to hosting parts or all of them virtually in order to reduce their footprint and improve accessibility (Participant 009, February 2022). Others have elected to keep their conferences in person now that COVID mitigation efforts have improved and “offered carbon offsets as part of conference registration” so attendees could sign up to offset their travel (Participant 013, February 2022).

Barriers

Despite the diversity of sustainability initiatives being implemented across the three organization types, and the apparent connections between them, the field has yet to see widespread or standardized adoption of any specific practices. Therefore, it was essential to ask

participants to try to identify reasons why sustainability has not yet become a primary focus of the field despite the rapid advance of climate change and the opportunity study abroad presents to address the assemblages of sustainability through its programming. Participants offered two primary themes as barriers to widespread implementation: staff time and size, and lack of impactful engagement.

Staff Time and Size

The COVID-19 impact has not only influenced student mobility, but also study abroad offices at HEIs and POs who have had to cut their budgets and staff. Even prior to the pandemic, many institutions' education abroad office staff sizes were small, many of them with only one staff person who may or may not be full time (NAFSA, 2020). This has a large impact of the work that staff are able to accomplish when it comes to student mobility, as they frequently “wear many hats” and have to give preference to other arguably more pressing priorities rather than sustainability (Participant 002, February 2022). Even when sustainability is a priority for an office, resulting in them perhaps attending a training or assessing their practices, staff often do not have the time to follow up on their learnings and address any issues or areas for improvement (Participant 009, February 2022). Six of the fifteen interview participants mentioned staff time and size as a barrier to their sustainability efforts.

Lack of Impactful Engagement

Tied to the issue of staff time is the second theme, which speaks to the level of engagement with sustainability initiatives. Participants noted that it can be challenging to get people “on board” with these efforts so they will “become involved in a way that has impact” (Participant 004, February 2022). Participant 006 from an HEI also noted that there is a certain amount of isolation of both the international education office and those focused on sustainability within those offices. A reason for this was aptly stated by Participant 009, from a PA, who stated

that there is a lingering need for international education in Western nations to be reframed so that it is less focused on the outcomes of the student experience and able to think beyond issues of student growth (February 2022). Another PA participant shared insight that due to the pandemic, priorities in international education are focused on physical and mental health, and risk management; therefore, this is where funding and efforts are going at this time (Participant 015, February 2022).

On a more positive note, Participant 013, from a PA, observed that as the number of faculty-led programs increase, the field is seeing more engagement from study abroad administrators seeking to help those faculty make their programs more sustainable in terms of program design and logistical choices (February 2022). This suggests that, at least anecdotally, the field may be moving more towards collaborations for impactful engagement on this issue.

Other

A final barrier that was not raised by a significant number of participants but that is important to consider nonetheless is program length. As the study abroad field has sought to expand the accessibility of its programs and make them appeal to a greater diversity of students, engagement with traditional semester-long study abroad programs has decreased (IIE Open Doors, 2021a). More students are choosing short-term, faculty-led programs, or those that take place outside of fall and spring semesters during J-term, Maymesters, or summer (IIE Open Doors, 2021a). As a result, participants, particularly those from PAs, noted that the field has less of an opportunity to facilitate programs with a positive impact when the programs are short. Participant 013 noted that “the longer a student is abroad, and the more immersive the experience,” the more impactful the program is able to be sustainability-wise.

Future Ideas

The study abroad field is at an unprecedented crossroads as the world begins to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and student mobility begins to resume. Therefore, participants of this study were asked to provide their insight into the future of the field. While no themes emerged across the participant pool, informants did share some interesting ideas – both positive and negative – about where they perceive study abroad to be heading in the near future.

HEI participants noted the opportunity to continue implementation of non-traditional program modalities that may have become more prevalent over the course of the pandemic. Emphasis on virtual programming and more localized initiatives that involved less travel, such as trans-border programs with Mexico or Canada, was noted by three study participants. Another noted an opportunity to utilize virtual engagements to “establish connections and relationships” prior to physical travel (Participant 003, February 2022).

Two participants spoke to a hope for more student engagement and push for more sustainable programming. A PA participant predicted that the field will see “a lot more from students in terms of demanding to know more about what they’re signing up for” that will push administrators to adjust programming to meet those needs (Participant 009, February 2022).

On a more negative note, two participants mentioned that there is a chance that this juncture could lead to a push to return to the status quo in an effort to increase study abroad participation to pre-pandemic levels as quickly as possible (Participant 005, February 2022). Participant 010 of a PA noted that the DEI efforts, which have seen an increase in the past two years, may result in a “really uncoordinated but very sustained drive to try and get more students thinking about studying abroad, particularly students of color and low-income students”.

Discussion

While the participants of this study represent a very small portion of the study abroad field, its findings suggest some salient themes around issues of sustainability in the sector. In general, participants' diverse perspectives on the issue, methods of negotiation, and implementation strategies suggest that as a sector, study abroad remains focused on traditional ideas and methods that do not serve the field in this era of climate change and social unrest. The following section will discuss and analyze these themes as they relate to the study abroad field.

Focus on Student Outcomes

Broadly speaking, study abroad stakeholders are primarily focused on measuring the impact and benefit of study abroad as it relates to student outcomes. As noted in the findings around sustainability perceptions, many participants relied on their belief in the deep impact of study abroad on students to justify the negative externalities of study abroad. Participants mentioned that as long as student learning was impactful enough to alter the mindset of participating students and influence their future beliefs and actions, then the negative environmental, social, and/or economic impacts of international travel could be justified.

This perspective represents a sector-wide tendency to neglect the assemblages of the field and resist an approach to study abroad that is sustainable or regenerative. The environmental impact of study abroad is only one aspect of sustainability that the field must consider. Social and economic impacts, which are intrinsic to education abroad, must also be considered. While some participants noted an effort to engage with local communities during the program design and implementation process, those efforts were made in order to improve student learning outcomes rather than to ensure a mutually beneficial exchange. Another participant noted the tendency to emphasize study abroad as an opportunity for students to become 'locals' in the destination they are visiting. Connected to the issue of centering positive student outcomes as the

primary goal of study abroad, the idea that students can take on a ‘local’ persona through a study abroad experience removes the true local peoples’ rightful ownership over and empowerment within their location, neglecting their right to their land and adopting a colonizer-like perspective of culture and practices.

One barrier to widespread sustainability initiative implementation that is worth noting as it relates to the prioritization of student outcomes is program length. As previously noted, more than 60% of study abroad programs that take place currently are short-term programs between one and eight weeks in length (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 1). This shift away from semester- or academic year-length programs is as a result of the field’s efforts to increase accessibility for students who may not be able to participate in international education programming due to financial or curricular barriers. However, if the sector continues to adjust program modalities to adapt to students wants and needs (i.e., making programs shorter) it will continue to be challenging to engage in sustainable environmental, social, and economic practices. The field may also have to confront students’ desire for accessible program modalities with their desire for sustainable program implementation. Developing programs that return to the same location and engage with the same people each year or semester may help to offset any negative social or economic impact, but in the end the benefits of a short-term engagement will be hard-pressed to counteract the negative environmental impact of a long-haul flight.

Based on these findings, I argue that the study abroad field should seek to reevaluate the basis of its work and seek to fully acknowledge the global nature of study abroad in order to engage in the practice in a way that benefits all. In essence, the field must take an assemblage approach that rejects “one-sided explanation models that prioritize one type of factor or driving force over another” in order to do this (Spies and Alff, 2020, p. 2). To begin, stakeholders may

establish benchmarks within their evaluation systems that track and measure sustainability outcomes beyond those directly related to students and their learning. The noted shift in focus around the definition of sustainability among study participants to incorporate elements of DEI into their work suggests potential to incorporate sustainability into institutional initiatives given the inextricable link between them.

Disparate Effort

While participants in this study were generally aware and perceptive of sustainability issues in their work and study abroad in general, tangible efforts to confront those issues were stated to be implemented inconsistently across the field. Participants noted occasional carbon offset programs – either institutionally- or personally-funded, tree planting programs, transportation method studies, and community service days as ways in which their individual organizations, institutions, or programs seek to address the issue of sustainability within their sector. However, it was common that participants either were not aware of an institution- or organization-wide policy that standardized and enforced those sustainability practices or they simply stated that there was no policy, leaving the onus on individual people or offices to ensure that sustainability measures were implemented. Therefore, I argue that all study abroad stakeholders need to convene to determine the concrete measures that may be implemented to address issues of sustainability across the field and establish enforceable policies that are maintained at the institutional or organizational level. The relationships of HEIs, POs, and PAs provides a unique opportunity to start these initiatives. HEIs and POs, as members of PAs, have the opportunity to call on the associations to implement learning and engagement opportunities around topics of sustainability. PAs have the opportunity to heed this call, set further standards, suggest policies for the field, much like The Forum on Education Abroad's *Advancing the UN*

Sustainable Development Goals through Education Abroad, and lobby larger industries and governments for change that will support the field's efforts.

The Sustainable Development Goals were routinely cited by participants at HEIs, POs, and PAs in the conceptualization and implementation of sustainability initiatives. While some cite the challenges of the SDGs, including ambiguity, conflicting priorities, and challenges with measurement, they do allow for cross-topic conceptualization, which may help study abroad stakeholders to engage with initiatives that confront all three pillars of sustainability. On the other hand, the SDGs may allow them to focus solely on the goals that seem more relevant to study abroad, which tend to lean towards social and economic sustainability, while neglecting the more challenging and arguably more pressing issues of environmental sustainability.

Nonetheless, the SDGs provide a common starting point for diverse study abroad stakeholders to begin to formulate standardized and enforceable policies around sustainability measures with an assemblage perspective.

Relative Impact

Solutions to climate change or socio-economic inequality are not the sole responsibility of the study abroad field to solve. However, the field is uniquely positioned within higher education to offer global engagement opportunities that educate students on their personal impact and potential solutions to these issues in a broader context. Therefore, the notion cited by several participants of this study that the study abroad field's impact relative to other sectors is minimal and therefore less important to address is misguided. Participants argued that the negative impacts of study abroad are outweighed, or at least balanced, by the positive benefits received by the students who take part in the travel, learning from local communities and taking that knowledge with them throughout their lives. Others noted that it can be challenging to ask students to consider sustainability in study abroad when they live, work, and study in

communities that do not implement sustainability initiatives. For instance, those who have to commute to campus using cars because public transportation infrastructure is not accessible.

This perception that the study abroad sector's environmental impact is of lesser importance presents an opportunity for further investigation to determine the psychological reasoning for this type of justification and cognitive dissonance. Doing so will help the field to better understand how to combat this sense of relative apathy and come to terms with the complexities of study abroad's impact, allowing it to develop more comprehensive measures to address them. Additionally, the notion that climate change and other issues of sustainability cannot be solved by individual or small-scale actions has become more common among many sectors as consumers have sought to hold corporations and larger structures accountable for their outsized impact on the environment. However, it is important to realize that individual actions can make a difference, if only to influence others to perhaps do the same. In this sense, international education offices within larger institutions have the opportunity to set an example for their administrators and pressure them to take on more sustainable institutional practices. In turn, those institutions can put pressure on PAs to generate more awareness of sustainability initiatives across the field.

Reasons for Implementation

While many participants noted that their institutions or offices were implementing some sustainability measures, several were candid in admitting that those initiatives were put into practice for reasons outside of improved sustainability. Virtual study abroad programming, for instance, has only come to the forefront of the field after many years in existence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the ability to physically travel. As the field begins to resume travel once again, institutions will likely continue to offer virtual programming given its higher level of accessibility for students who may not be able to travel for financial, academic, or

other reasons. Nevertheless, ‘traditional’ study abroad involves student mobility and therefore the preference of the field remains to put more students on planes. While virtual exchanges may be a way to decrease the carbon footprint of study abroad and improve the depth of international interactions by extending the amount of time students are able to interact with their international counterparts, virtual programming is not implemented by institutions out of a desire to improve their sustainability. Instead, student learning outcomes are the impetus for these initiatives. Additionally, virtual exchanges are inherently different from physical study abroad, requiring unique technology and training in order to ensure a worthwhile and engaging experience. Therefore, these types of exchanges are not accessible at all institutions.

Another primary means of tangibly addressing environmental sustainability issues was noted to be carbon offsets. This was true at HEIs, which sometimes offered students the opportunity to offset their flights, at POs, which sometimes built offsets into their program fees, and at PAs, which noted offering conference attendees and staff the opportunity to offset their flights. However, most participants noted that their institution or organization lacked an overarching policy to enforce the use of carbon offsets for travel related to study abroad or other administrative needs. The fact that some institutions offer carbon offsetting measures shows that the field sees this solution as one of the few ways they can concretely address their environmental impact without substantially disrupting their practices. However, carbon offsets have long been critiqued as a “free pass for inaction” where polluters are able to buy their way out of feeling poorly about their decision to travel or otherwise pollute the atmosphere (United Nations Environment Programme, 2019). In the end, offsetting programs will not be able to slow or reduce overall emissions growth if other solutions are not also put into place (United Nations Environment Programme, 2019). Additionally, carbon offsets cost money. Therefore, either

institutions or individuals must commit to paying these fees in order to implement this solution. However, financial aid and other monetary matters are frequently listed as one of the primary barriers to study abroad participation (Dessoiff, 2006). Therefore, requiring offsets to be included in student fees in any capacity counteracts any efforts to increase accessibility in the field. In short, carbon offsets may be the only way study abroad stakeholders feel they can attempt to make a physical impact on the environmental impact of their actions, but the issues related to these practices and the inconsistency with which offset programs are implemented suggest that stakeholders are checking a box with this type of initiative, rather than seeking to think critically about how their work can be transformed to be more environmentally friendly.

In terms of social and economic sustainability, some participants noted a reliance on third-party study abroad providers as a way to ensure programs are developed with local perspectives in mind. Since these providers often have long-standing relationships in international communities, they are able to connect study abroad students with local people and businesses, allowing local perspectives to be shared and economic benefits to be disbursed directly to destination communities. However, provider use is often initiated in an effort to ease the burden of study abroad on HEIs who may not have the staff support or training to develop and implement programs. Additionally, providers offer additional safeguards around risk management that are increasingly important after the chaotic collective experience that was the recall of students abroad at the start of the pandemic. Once again, these potential sustainability initiatives are not necessarily driven by the desire to create sustainable programs, but to improve student outcomes both from a learning and a safety perspective. From a PO perspective, this research did show what appeared to be a more concerted effort to engage communities in their program planning and implementation. Frequent mention of homestay programs for students and

long-term in-country relationships suggest that this effort may address sustainability on all three levels – environmental, social, and economic – and provide a benefit not only to students but the people and places they are visiting.

As a result of these findings, I argue that the study abroad field needs a substantial shift in mindset to consider and act on sustainability initiatives in acknowledgement of the fact that without them, studying abroad may become an activity of the past regardless of its value to students. As students continue to make choices based on their perceived importance of sustainability initiatives and as the world continues to deal with the realities of climate change, justifications based on education outcomes will likely not be enough to maintain study abroad programs experienced by the wealthy and privileged members of global society. By refocusing the field's reasons for implementing study abroad to encompass not only benefits to ourselves and our students, but to consider how study abroad can be a globally beneficial practice, the sector has an opportunity to generate more substantial change that will make it simpler to continue to make study abroad more sustainable.

This research is not without limitations, however. The size of the cross-sectional sample of third-party providers, higher education institutions, and professional associations may not represent the overall education abroad sector and was selected non-randomly. Additionally, by organizing and analyzing results from diverse institutions within a framework of three distinct groups, it is possible to have overlooked important intra-group variation in perceptions and practices related to sustainability. Moreover, the sample only captures perceptions of leadership within each institution type. While the assumption is that leadership is knowledgeable and capable of representing their entire institution, further studies may find that the practice and policy influence of other parts of the institution are significant in sustainability work. Finally, the

research excludes the perspectives of students, whom are the population enrolling in study abroad programs. Students may influence the field to become more sustainable as their decisions to enroll may be driven by sustainability concerns, therefore their perspective would provide important perception of the future of the field. Still, these results provide useful insights into sector-wide perspectives on the barriers to sustainable practices and potential for rethinking best-practices in program design and travel.

While we argue that sustainability efforts are disparate and often uncoordinated, an important caveat of this work is that many institutions in the education abroad sector are actively interested in harmonizing their efforts to create transformative learning opportunities for students while adapting programming to reflect the urgency of the climate crisis. A possible further limitation of this study is that interviews were collected through virtual meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While limiting the opportunity to meet participants face to face on campuses, at conferences, or in the office, the pandemic notably forced the sector to pause most programs due to travel restrictions and became a time of reflection on our sustainability practices for many institutions across the education abroad sector.

Directions of Future Research

Given the small sample size of this study and the lack of current research in the field on the topic, the opportunities for future research are extensive. The primary suggestion for future research would be to expand this study to its originally intended sample size or beyond to create a more comprehensive overview of institutional and organization perceptions and practices. Adding additional participants to this study would create a more robust data pool, which may result in the strengthening of existing themes or emergence of new ones, strengthening the results of this research. Based on the emphasis on student learning outcomes throughout the

research findings, further research specifically related to student perception of sustainability in study abroad would be beneficial as well given students' increased concern and consideration around the issue of climate change (Carter, 2020). 83% of Gen Z students surveyed by the University of Winchester stated that an institution's values play an important role in their decision of where to attend school (Carter, 2020). These sentiments will likely factor into students' decisions around study abroad and therefore, if the field is concerned with continual improvement of student outcomes and engagement, studying student perceptions will be key to informing how the sector moves forward.

It would also be helpful to expand the research into HEIs, focusing on a greater number and diversity of institutions and interviewing faculty and staff, as well as administrators, to better understand their perceptions of implementation and barriers to sustainability initiatives. A greater understanding of the reality of sustainability initiative implementation could benefit from a deeper study into the work and perceptions of study abroad advisors, coordinators, and implementers at the HEI and PO level. Based on the results of this study, it is highly likely that HEIs across the U.S. and around the world are developing creative and unique sustainability initiatives. Surveying them and sharing best practices with the field would allow for more engagement in sustainability initiatives. It would also be possible to approach this research from a psychological perspective to investigate further the specific reasons for humans' tendency to seek to justify our actions when it comes to issues like sustainability. This approach would allow the field to better understand how to combat this tendency and influence more action.

Finally, as study abroad and sustainability are inherently global issues, future research should also explore international perceptions and actions around sustainability in study abroad, perhaps through a comparative lens. The field often cites the opportunity for students to learn

about sustainability initiatives from local and indigenous communities while on study abroad programs, therefore it is important that study abroad implementers also seek to learn from these communities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this capstone research was to collect comprehensive insights into the diversity of perspectives of sustainability throughout the study abroad field through an assemblage lens. By asking participants from higher education institutions, third party study abroad provider organizations, and professional associations questions around their perception, negotiation, conceptualization, and implementation of sustainability initiatives in study abroad, this capstone sought to assist the field in better understanding itself, therefore equipping it with knowledge to assist in its communication, navigation, and innovation around the inevitable complexities of the issue at hand. Approaching this issue with an assemblage perspective, acknowledging that sustainability issues do not exist in isolation, allowed the study to investigate the variety of ways in which the sector impacts the planet and its people.

Despite the relatively small sample size of this study compared to the breadth of the study abroad sector, these interviews provided great insight into the state of field. It was identified that although stakeholders are aware of and considering the issue of sustainability in their work, the field lacks substantive overarching policies on sustainability that would allow it to enact and enforce measures to offset the field's negative global impact. Study abroad remains focused primarily on student learning and outcomes, reflecting a traditional approach to international education that has been in place since the 20th century. As a result, stakeholders feel that the relative impact of study abroad can be counteracted through the integration of sustainability topics into curricula to educate students on those matters and influence them to be more

sustainable in the future. Findings also suggested that when sustainability measures are enacted, they are done so for reasons other than improved sustainability, whether that be financial reasons, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, or improved student engagement abroad. And even when these initiatives are implemented, the lack of policy enforcement around them results in a reliance on the good will of singular individuals, offices, or institutions to uphold them.

As a result of these findings, I recommend the following next steps for the field as we seek to engage with issues of sustainability in a substantive and effective way:

1. Establish a sector-wide policy outlining concrete sustainability measures to be implemented by HEIs, POs, and PAs. These would include a commitment to existing measures such as carbon offsets, reducing waste and consumption, reciprocity with local partners, and others to influence an immediate improvement of the field's practices, as well as longer term actions and goals.
2. Call on the field to sign onto this policy. Signatories will be published publicly to influence higher engagement among stakeholders and allow students to make informed decisions about their place of study.
3. Advance monitoring and evaluation apparatuses either through the improvement of existing tools or the development of new instruments in order to assess the complete current impact of the field and existing sustainability initiatives. In conjunction with these evaluations, the field may consider sanctioning signatories who are not meeting established sustainability targets.
4. Research and consider the differences and similarities of in-person and virtual international education opportunities in alignment with expanded global education goals in order to determine whether the learning outcomes are comparable. Doing so may allow the field to implement fewer in-person programs, while still allowing students to gain similar skills and knowledge.
5. Professional associations and other stakeholders with influence should lobby for improved sustainability policies and efforts within the larger industries that study abroad takes place within such as the aviation and energy sectors. Utilizing both institutional lobbying power and the power of student populations will create an impactful force to create change in these areas, which may allow the field to continue implementation of in-person travel programs.

As the world continues to confront issues related to climate change and social and economic justice on a global scale, the study abroad sector finds itself at pivotal point in its history.

Stakeholders have the opportunity to learn about the ways in which their practices have broad

reaching effects on the planet and its people, beyond the students who take part in study abroad programming. As this research found, perception and negotiations of issues of sustainability in study abroad are varied and inconsistently implemented across institution and organization types. I argue that this lack of policy at an institutional level limits the potential broader impact of the sustainability measures such as carbon offsets, tree planting, or others that are implemented by some but not all stakeholders in the sector. Additionally, from a development perspective, these efforts neglect to acknowledge the fact that study abroad is a practice that is inherently privileged and focuses on the benefits of the students who take part in it. Therefore, it is essential that the field take this opportunity to think deeply about its engagement with travel and learning and seek to transform the practice of studying abroad into one that is regenerative, mutually beneficial, and seeks to do no harm.

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Appendix A: Interview Invitation Email

Dear [Insert Participant Name],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Megan Zacher, and I am a current graduate student in the Sustainable Development Master's program at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute. Outside of my role as a student, I am a Program Officer at World Learning with [the IDEAS \(Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students\) Program](#). I am reaching out to you today in my capacity as a student to request your participation in an interview as part of my Capstone research project. This project will investigate how stakeholders in the study abroad field negotiate issues of sustainability, including environmental impact, ethics, diversity, equity, and inclusion in their efforts to encourage and support students at U.S.-based institutions in their international education journey.

To gather qualitative data to guide this research, I am requesting your participation in a voluntary one-hour virtual interview. Your interview would be one of approximately 24 interviews taking place as part of this study. Interview subjects will be Presidents, CEOs, and Sustainability Officers at higher education institutions, third-party study abroad providers, and super-institutional organizations (i.e., NAFSA, CIEE, AIEA, etc.). The goal of this research is to generate an understanding of sustainability initiatives in study abroad programming from theory to practice. I will explore how sustainability is perceived and negotiated at the higher education institution, third-party study abroad provider, and super-institution levels; how sustainability initiatives are conceptualized versus how they are implemented; and what barriers exist to widespread consideration and implementation of these practices in the study abroad field.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may choose to forgo any interview questions, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. To protect your anonymity and identity, all individual responses will be completely anonymous aside from your institution type to those outside this research project. While the results of this study will be shared internally within the SIT Graduate Institute and available to all interview participants and SIT staff for future research, your name or any other identifying information beyond institution type will not be used or included in shared results.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate your availability via the scheduling link below. This link will allow you to select a date and time between now and February 11, 2022, as well as your preferred virtual meeting platform. <scheduling link.>

If you have any questions about this study at any time, please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email or phone call. My contact information is listed in my email signature. Thank you for your consideration of this request and your continued commitment to the study abroad field.

Sincerely,

Megan Zacher
megan.zacher@mail.sit.edu
630-460-0918

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do stakeholders in the study abroad field negotiate issues of sustainability, including environmental impact, ethics, diversity, equity, and inclusion in their efforts to encourage and support students at United States-based institutions in their international education journey?
- How is sustainability perceived and negotiated at the super-institution, higher education institution, and third-party study abroad provider levels?
- How are sustainability initiatives conceptualized versus how are they implemented?
- What barriers exist to widespread consideration and implementation of these practices in the study abroad field?

SUSTAINABILITY DEFINITION: While there are varied definitions of the term sustainability, in this study I define the concept as the effort to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” as it relates to the environment, social sustainability, sensible economics, and the interconnectedness of all these domains (Brundtland, 1987; Caradonna, 2014).

INTRODUCTION

The PI will begin the conversation by introducing herself and the research study using the information listed above. She will also ask for initial consent to record the interview.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As a student and a professional in the study abroad field, I look forward to talking with you about your thoughts around sustainability in this industry.

As you are aware, I am conducting a case study to explore how issues of sustainability including environmental impact, ethics, diversity, equity, and inclusion are negotiated within the study abroad field. To do this, I am facilitating these interviews with various stakeholders at higher education institutions, third-party study abroad providers, and super-institutional organizations to learn more about how study abroad sustainability initiatives develop from theory to practice.

For this interview, I will ask you a series of questions regarding your background and role within your organization/institution, your institution/organization’s general perception and practices around sustainability, and your thoughts on the future of the field. At the end, I will provide space for you to ask me any questions you would like, but please feel free to ask questions as we talk should any arise.

Are there any questions I can answer now?

Before I begin, I will need to get your verbal consent to continue with this interview. I am going to read a brief consent statement to you. If you could respond out loud to indicate your agreement to participate in this survey, then we can get started.

VERBAL CONSENT

I have been provided with information outlining this study and its expectations of me as a participant via written and verbal communication. I consent to participate in a 1-hour interview

as part of this study and understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I may choose to forgo any questions and may withdraw my consent to participate at any time. My responses may be withdrawn within two weeks of this interview date. I understand that this interview will be recorded and that the recording and transcript of the recording will be maintained for up to 5 years following the completion of this study in a password protected document Drive. I also understand that in any report on the results of this research, all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially, my identity will remain anonymous, my name and any other identifying information or references will be removed.

INTERVIEW

Background

- (If necessary) Please confirm your title at [organization].
- How long have you worked in the study abroad field?
- Can you tell me a bit about your experience in the field? How did you get to this role?
- In general, what does sustainability in study abroad mean to you?
 - o Potentially follow-up question: Do you perceive there to be any relationship between study abroad and sustainability?
- Do you have any prior experience or training in the sustainability field?

As a reminder, for the purposes of this study, sustainability includes environmental impact, ethics, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Institutional Questions

- In your own words, what would you say [institution/organization]'s stance is on sustainability?
- Is sustainability a part of your organization's mission statement, core values, pillars, or similar concepts?
 - o If yes, how do you see this idea enacted within your organization?
- Does your institution's view of sustainability encompass more than just environmental aspects of sustainability? (*If needed: for example, ethics, diversity, equity, inclusion, etc.*)
 - o If yes, how does your institution integrate these aspects of sustainability?
 - Does your study abroad office have their own vision and/or mission that includes sustainability?
 - o If no, why do you think your institution does not integrate all aspects of sustainability?
 - Do you think your institution should incorporate more broad aspects of sustainability?
 - How do you think they may be able to do so?
- Does your institution have an office or staff person dedicated to sustainability and/or DEI efforts?
 - o If yes, how long has this office/person been in place?
- In what ways does your organization support sustainability initiatives within your organization?
- In what ways does your organization support sustainability initiatives with your partner organizations?

- *For applicable participants:* In what ways does your organization support sustainability initiatives with your implementers?
- *For higher-up staff:* From your perspective as [title], how do you see sustainability initiatives implemented by your institution/organization trickling down to operating programs?
 - o Do you feel that any initiatives you have implemented have had an impact on how study abroad is implemented?
- *For implementing staff:* From your perspective as [implementing staff title], how do you see any sustainability initiatives that you implement in your program(s) influencing policy within your organization/institution?
 - o *For third party orgs/HEIs:* do you feel like you or your institution has the space or power to influence larger organizations like NAFSA or the Forum on Education Abroad when it comes to issues of sustainability?
- *For third-party orgs/HEIs:* Do you experience any consideration of sustainability initiatives by students, either your own or those of the institutions you work with?
 - o Does your institution/organization make any attempt to funnel students towards programs that exemplify your institution’s ideas on sustainability?
- *For super-institutional organizations:* To put it bluntly, the continuation of study abroad is essential to the life of your organization, therefore it is in your interest to maintain the field, which will not be possible if climate change continues its current trajectory. Does your institution therefore have any plans to address this issue?

As I have touched upon in some of the questions above, sustainability is more than just environmental impact – it includes social and economic factors as well. The following questions will seek to address each of these aspects of sustainability.

Environmental Impact

- As I am sure you are aware, in most cases of traditional study abroad, international travel takes place. This leaves us with a “necessary evil” in the carbon footprint of international flights. How does your institution/organization seek to reconcile that?
- Many institutions/organizations use carbon offsetting to lessen their environmental impact. Is this something your organization does?
 - o Are there other ways your institution seeks to lessen its environmental impact?
- Climate change, largely caused by the actions of Western nations, has an outsized impact on people and regions of lower socio-economic status, particularly in the Global South. The current study abroad field frequently promotes travel to these “less-common destinations”. How do you think the field should begin to work to reconcile our negative impact as Westerners with this push to travel to places that may seek to exist as a result of our actions?

Social Impact

- One of the primary goals of study abroad is to increase students’ levels of cultural awareness and understanding of global inequities, but we don’t often talk about the inverse of that and how these programs impact local communities, which may be in

negative ways. How does your institution reconcile or seek to counteract the potential negative social impacts of students visiting other regions of the world?

- Does your institution consider taking any steps to ensure that study abroad programs are mutually beneficial for sending and receiving countries?

Economic Impact

- Study abroad can have a positive economic impact on receiving locations by bringing in students who will inevitably contribute to the local economy. Other benefits like stipends for homestay families may also contribute. Does your institution seek to maintain any practices or initiatives that lessen economic dependence on this sort of economic support?
 - If yes, how so?

Concluding Questions

- As we begin to return to study abroad following the pause as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you see the field changing and developing?
 - Has the pause in study abroad programming provided your institution with any space to think more deeply about sustainability initiatives?
- Is your institution/organization considering any changes in the ways you program, how you support students/faculty, how you present study abroad, etc.?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share about your thoughts related to study abroad and sustainability?

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me and participate in this study. As I mentioned, I am passionate about the intersection of study abroad and sustainability and I look forward to sharing my findings with you once my Capstone is complete in May 2022. I am hopeful that my research will provide a baseline for the field to use to maintain their work and continue to provide the valuable opportunity of study abroad for future generations.

If you have any questions between now and this May, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you again!