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Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes: SIT Study Abroad

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Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes: SIT Study Abroad

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Abstract

This capstone reports on the results of the SIT Study Abroad Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes survey, a research project designed to investigate how alumni would self-report impacts of their study abroad experience with regard to academic, personal, and professional outcomes. The principal question the study sought to answer was “*How and to what extent do SIT Study Abroad programs impact alumni in the long term?*” This paper focuses largely on the career outcomes of the alumni who participated in this research. A large percentage of SIT Study Abroad alumni report that impacts to their career choices were significant and that their study abroad experience was helpful in some unique ways when applying for graduate school or employment opportunities. In addition to working in internationally focused careers, alumni have gravitated towards some specific fields, according to data from the study. Alumni indicated how and to what extent their study abroad experience influenced their choice of professional field and academic study. Results seem to indicate that SIT Study Abroad alumni are highly accomplished as well as socially conscious, choosing the education, health, and nonprofit fields in large numbers. Some program variables are explored for their impact on outcomes and careers including program country, program theme, and participants’ declared undergraduate major. Implications for further study are discussed.

Introduction

Study abroad continues to grow in popularity in the United States. The latest data from the Institute of International Education (IIE) show that U.S. undergraduate students are studying abroad in higher numbers than ever before, and that study abroad participation has more than tripled over the past two decades (IIE, 2013). There is a growing emphasis on assessment of study abroad outcomes as well. One of the stated goals of IIE's "Generation Study Abroad" initiative is that members who sign on will "conduct research studies on applicants and alumni to understand motivations for study abroad and impact of study abroad" (IIE, 2014).

To date, most research on study abroad outcomes has focused on short-term student perceptions of international experiences; attitudes and values; language acquisition; and other measurable metrics. Research has been conducted using pre- and post- study abroad assessments, such as those used in the Georgetown Consortium Project (Van de Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009) or by a single institution for the purpose of evaluating their own programs' effectiveness (i.e., Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004). When assessing whether or not programs have met their learning objectives, this is appropriate. However, there is a growing demand for additional data on long-term outcomes and impacts of study abroad programming.

At SIT Study Abroad, there is anecdotal evidence and a general perception that programs have a significant impact on alumni's academic and career choices, but no data previously existed that showed results of all programming over a long period of time. From time to time, individual alumni are profiled for the SIT Study Abroad blog in an "alumni achievement" section (SIT Study Abroad, 2014), but a bigger picture was desired. This paper will present the results of the first long-term research study on alumni impacts, outcomes, and perspectives conducted on all alumni of SIT Study Abroad programs.

Literature Review

A few notable research studies have been conducted on the long-term impacts and outcomes of study abroad. Research demonstrates that study abroad has a strong impact on career, educational, and life decisions. Alumni self-report that study abroad was one of the most impactful aspects of their entire college experience (Wallace, 1999; Fry, Jon, Josić, Paige, & Stallman, 2009). The Institute for Educational Study Abroad (IES Abroad) conducted a survey in 2002 of alumni whose experiences spanned 50 years, exploring impacts on career, education, and other factors, as well as exploring different outcomes according to variables, such as program design and the decade of study (Dwyer, 2004b; Dwyer & Norris, 2005). The AFS Long Term Impacts Study (Hansel, 2008) gathered data from alumni who had participated in AFS programs twenty-five years prior, and compared findings to a control group. The SAGE (Study Abroad for Global Engagement) study explored the long-term impact of study abroad on multiple aspects of alumni's life choices and attitudes, comparing alumni of twenty-two different institutions and ultimately gathering data from a control group, as well (Fry, et al., 2009, 2010). These major studies, as well as other, smaller studies cited in this paper, have informed the design of the research documented in this paper.

Findings indicate that personal impacts, i.e. impacts on beliefs and attitudes, can last years after the study abroad experience, leading to reduced anxiety when interacting with other cultures, increased propensity to have friends and colleagues from other cultures (Hansel, 2008; Dwyer, 2004a), and motivation to pass on cross-cultural values to one's children and family members (Hansel, 2008). Over 90 percent of IES Abroad alumni indicate that their study abroad experience “continues to influence my perspective on how I view the world” [*sic*] (Dwyer, 2004a, p. 19).

In addition to lasting impacts on study abroad alumni's worldviews, the IES Abroad alumni survey revealed that “nearly 90 percent of students indicated that their experiences abroad had

influenced all their subsequent educational experiences” (Dwyer, 2004a; McMillan, & Opem, 2004, p. 58). Compared to non-study abroad participants, study abroad alumni earn bachelor’s degrees at a higher rate and complete them earlier, pursue and achieve advanced degrees at a higher rate, and tend to seek out additional international academic experiences (Rubin and Sutton, 2004, 2010; Fry, et al., 2010; Hansel, 2008). When responding to open-ended questions on general impacts of study abroad, alumni indicate that the experience led to a discovery of a new field of study or that they found a passion on which to focus academically that inspired them to choose a career or attend graduate school (Fry, et al., 2007; Shallenberger, 2006). Academic achievements can be indispensable for taking the next step towards career achievement as credentials are necessary to obtain many jobs, so these outcomes cannot be ignored. More importantly, the passion that is gained from study abroad experiences and the impact on alumni’s worldview can directly affect their choice of career, a major focus of the research detailed in this paper.

Career-Based Outcomes and Impacts

There is an increasing focus in the international education field on career outcomes and benefits of study abroad. Firstly, employers need prospective employees with intercultural skills and global knowledge. The recent American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Survey of Employers reported that intercultural skills are among the areas on which they place the highest priority (p. 6), and knowledge of “global issues” and “societies and cultures outside the U.S.” [*sic*] (p.7) are both areas that are priorities when it comes to hiring recent graduates. Employers largely agree that all students “should learn about societies and cultures outside the U.S. [*sic*] and global issues and developments” (p. 9) (Hart Research Associates, 2013). Then, there is the desire in the field of international education to understand and document the outcomes of study abroad programs, beyond the anecdotal stories that all administrators and students love to share about how study

abroad “changed their life,” and beyond the immediate impact on students’ attitudes and desires upon their return from a sojourn.

Some clear themes emerge in the literature regarding long-term professional impacts of study abroad. Study abroad alumni are likely to experience a change in career plans as a result of studying abroad; alumni consistently self-report that their international experience has had at least some, if not a significant, impact on their career choices (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1991; Dwyer, 2004a; Dwyer, 2004b; Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Fry, et al., 2009; Franklin, 2010; DeGraaf et al., 2013).

Research has not well documented specifically the career fields chosen by alumni of study abroad programs. What is known is that alumni of study abroad programs are more likely to engage in international work or volunteerism (Hansel, 2008; Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Fry, Jon, Josić, Paige, & Stallman, 2010), to work for a multi-national organization in the United States or get jobs overseas, and to use non-English languages in the workplace (Hansel, 2008; Gillespie & Norris, 2009; Dwyer, 2004b). Alumni report that study abroad has given them skills that were useful or helpful in their career search, including interviews, applications, or resumes (Carlson, et al., 1991; Wallace, 1999; Paige, et al., 2009; Gillespie & Norris, 2009; Mistretta, 2008; Franklin, 2008). When responding to open-ended questions on general impacts of study abroad, research shows that, similar to academic impacts, the study abroad experience has given some alumni a passion and a focus that fuels future engagement and achievement; for example, an alumnus/a might develop a focus on a geographic region or a field of research that lasts for years after their experience (Shallenberger, 2006; Fry, Jon, Josić, Paige, & Stallman, 2010). Also, the study abroad experience affects participants’ values in a way that impacts decisions they make in the personal, academic and professional arena (Fry, et al., 2009). Alumni report seeking to replicate some aspect of the

international experience in future endeavors – such as teaching English abroad or working with immigrant populations at home (Thurber, 1998; Wallace, 1999; Carlson, et al., 1991; Fry, et al., 2007; Shallenberger, 2006).

Most studies have clear shortcomings from a research standpoint; they tend to focus on alumni of one institution, may have small sample sizes, and may only focus on alumni of one particular year or destination. Recommendations for research across a broader population in order to gather data generally applicable to the field are common. There are a few exceptions. The CIEE researchers (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1991) surveyed alumni of multiple institutions. Anyone who did research for a provider, such as SIT Study Abroad (Thurber, 1998; Shallenberger, 2006) or IES Abroad (i.e., Dwyer, 2004a), has access to alumni from multiple institutions, though they did all participate in study abroad programs organized by the same provider, so there is a bit less diversity there. Perhaps most notably, the Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) research team selected 22 diverse institutions to participate in research on long-term study abroad outcomes on U.S undergraduate students, including two study abroad providers (one of which was SIT Study Abroad.) The researchers collected data from over 6,000 alumni of study abroad programs using an online survey, and interviewed alumni who were willing to speak further about their experience (Fry, et al., 2009, 2010).

The lack of a control (non-study abroad alumni) group is another common shortcoming in study abroad research, as it means that only correlation can be claimed, not causation. The AFS Long Term Impact Study (Hansel, 2008) did gather data from a control group, as did the SAGE study (Fry, et al., 2009). Hansel reported that the differences between the control (non-study abroad) group and the AFS alumni, or “returnees,” are as follows, in terms of career impacts (2008, p.9):

- Increased fluency and use of foreign languages
- Increased tendency to seek a job that involves interaction with different cultures

- More likely to have lived abroad for work or for spouse's work
- More likely to have spent time volunteering for an international or intercultural organization

In a 2010 article, The SAGE team published the results of additional research that included a control group. They documented the following statistically significant differences between the control group and study abroad alumni: those who had studied abroad rated their time abroad as much more significant than non-study abroad students rated any other experience during the college years; the study abroad group was more likely to be concerned about social responsibility than the non-study abroad group, for example, being much more likely to base purchasing decisions on the values of a company; and the study abroad group was more likely to pursue internationally-oriented graduate degrees (Fry, et al., 2010). Orahood, Kruze, and Pearson (2004) surveyed recent alumni about their career goals a short time after studying abroad, and compared findings to a non-study abroad control group of students majoring in the same discipline, which was business. Findings indicated that students who had studied abroad reported having goals of wanting to work abroad or work for an international firm in the United States. at much higher rates than those who did not study abroad, as well as having increased motivation to use foreign languages in the workplace (2004).

Only a few studies have compared outcomes dependent on different variables, for example, program design or length, or student major. Analyzing results by decade show that “graduates of the 1980s and 1990s reported that studying abroad influenced to a greater degree their getting a job overseas or working for a multinational organization in the United States than did previous generations” (Dwyer, 2004a, pp. 17-19). The country of study can make a difference; multiple studies have found increased impact on those alumni of programs where English was not the native language of their program country (Dwyer, 2004b; Gillespie & Norris, 2009; Franklin, 2010; DeGraaf, et al., 2013). Thurber (1998) surveyed only alumni of SIT Study Abroad Asian programs and found that respondents who had studied in Tibet reported a slightly higher rate of personal and

professional impacts than alumni of other program countries. The SAGE research team found that “depth of program” led to a higher rate of civic engagement – one factor of “depth of program” being the development index of the country of study (Fry, et al., 2010). DeGraaf, Slagter, Larsen, and Ditta (2013) found that that social work and sociology majors tended to report a greater shift in values and behavior upon returning, which was partially credited to the developing nature of their program countries. Also regarding student majors, DeGraaf, et al. reported that alumni who had majored in Spanish reported more positive career impacts than those that had majored in business.

One limitation that all of these studies have in common is the self-identification of participants who are willing to provide their responses to surveys and interviews. It may be that the alumni who have the most positive memories of their study abroad experiences or are most successful in their current professional or personal lives are the most motivated to complete such surveys. It must be considered, as well, to what extent causation can be claimed from any results. Study abroad participants do bring existing interests and traits to their experiences. Study abroad participants often have higher GPAs in high school and/or higher SAT scores, which would also lead to higher GPAs in college and possibly less time to graduation (Rubin and Sutton, 2004, 2010; Paige, et al., 2009). Students are increasingly choosing their undergraduate institution based on its study abroad offerings (Dwyer, 2004a). AFS found that those who had chosen to study abroad were more likely to have traveled before their study abroad experience and had parents that had encouraged and also participated in international travel (Hansel, 2008). What differentiates students who choose to study abroad from those who do not bears exploring in further research and it should be considered if and how these factors should be controlled for when reporting study abroad impacts.

Research Design and Methodology

The research was designed to evaluate what, if any, are the long-term impacts and outcomes of SIT Study Abroad programs. It investigates the personal, academic, and professional outcomes of SIT Study Abroad programming as reported by alumni who participated in programs anywhere from 3 to 32 years prior. Additionally, it was of interest to the SIT Study Abroad administrators and staff whether or not the outcomes were consistent with the stated priorities and core values of SIT Study Abroad. The design was largely exploratory. Data was collected mainly through qualitative measures but was supplemented by open-ended questions and follow-up interviews with willing alumni. After reviewing other similar research that has been done on long-term U.S.-based alumni of study abroad programs, the electronic survey used as the primary method of data collection included questions on the following topics: alumni demographics; level of educational attainment and the impact of the study abroad experience on academic choices; which aspects of the study abroad experience were most impactful for students; continued engagement with study abroad host country and/or host family, other country residents, or fellow students; alumni's career choices and the impacts of the study abroad experience on career choices and path; and level of civic engagement of SIT Study Abroad alumni including voluntary simplicity and social responsibility. The use of the survey format allowed for comparison on different variables once data was returned, namely, student undergraduate major, year and decade of program participation, program country (specifically, development level of program country).

Other research has analyzed outcomes according to the variable of program model; for example, whether short-term programs have an impact comparable to that of semester-long programs, or whether an internship or volunteer component affects alumni's reported outcomes. All of SIT's programs follow the same basic program model and so comparison between short- and

long-term programs or between those programs including or lacking internship components was not part of the study design.

However, one additional goal of this research was to explore whether or not the undergraduate research component, which is an important part of the SIT Study Abroad curriculum, results in any unique outcomes as reported by program alumni, when compared with alumni reports from other studies. Also, given the current research indicating the relationship between study abroad in developing countries and its potential for higher impacts on study abroad alumni, the hypothesis was that SIT Study Abroad alumni might report more or different personal and professional outcomes as compared to other studies.

In developing the survey, similar research was considered and taken into account when creating the questions and survey design. For ease of comparison between results, the wording of some questions was very similar or identical to questions on similar surveys, and the scale was similar to that of questions used in the SAGE survey, with response choices of “To a large degree, to some degree, very little, or not at all.” Administrators and staff at SIT’s departments of Assessment, Marketing, and University Relations, as well as the Provost and Vice Provost, provided ideas and feedback that contributed greatly to the structure and content of the survey. The survey was first tested with a small group of SIT Study Abroad alumni, who agreed to the task. It was then sent by e-mail in January, 2014, from the Vice-Provost’s office to all alumni who had participated in an SIT Study Abroad program or programs anytime between and including the years 1982-2011, excluding International Honors Program (IHP) participants and SIT Study Abroad alumni from 2012 and 2013.

The sample size was limited to those program alumni for whom SIT had current e-mail addresses on file. After accounting for undeliverable e-mails and those who had previously “opted

out” of surveys, the survey was successfully sent to 16,316 alumni. In total, four decades of alumni were represented in the sample. The overall response was 2,107, a 13 percent response rate.

An additional 984 respondents said they would be willing to speak to someone further about their experience and of those volunteers, a group was selected for follow-up interviews that included at least two representatives from each decade, the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010-2011 which included a person for each decade who had studied in a developing country and one who had studied in a Western European country. The interviews were short, approximately 15 minutes, and participants were asked to expand upon how, if at all, they had incorporated their international experience into their professional and personal lives, and what impact their study abroad experience had had on their careers.

Using the data collected in the survey, including analysis of responses to open-ended questions, combined with the interview results, trends and themes were identified, and comparisons made between different groups and demographics. If the data was analyzed for statistical significance, the Chi-squared analysis test was used.

The study lacks a control group; the results cannot, therefore, be attributed to causation, but only to correlation. It is also dependent on the goodwill of those who are willing to complete the survey. It may be that those alumni who had the most positive experiences are more likely to return a survey which took approximately twenty-five minutes to complete. Also, the data is dependent on the perceptions and self-reporting of alumni about their career paths, which are not likely to be completely objective.

SIT Study Abroad priorities and program evaluation

SIT Study Abroad states its priorities as academic quality, safety and security, diversity, reciprocity, and global citizenship (SIT Study Abroad 2014 Course Catalog, 2013). These study results may provide a way to assess and evaluate how well SIT achieves these priorities in the long-term.

In the program design, the hallmark features reflect the organization's priorities, which are:

- Rigorous academic programming through a field-based, experiential approach;
- Undergraduate research through an independent study project (ISP);
- Cultural immersion through fieldwork, intensive language study, and urban and rural homestays with local families;
- A small group of students on each program, supported by SIT faculty and staff, homestay families, in-country experts, and community members;
- Access to SIT's local resources and networks; and
- A commitment to reciprocity as the foundation of our [sic] educational philosophy

SIT Study Abroad possesses certain attributes that set it apart from other programs in the market, namely, consistency across programs in terms of length and structure; a unique program design that includes undergraduate research and a truly immersive experience with homestays; and multiple programs offered in developing countries. All programs are either an academic semester (four months/sixteen weeks) or a summer term (nine weeks). No shorter programs are offered. The International Honors Program (IHP), also an SIT program, used to offer year-long programs; however, IHP alumni were not included in this survey, because they had, only some months prior, filled out a very similar survey on career outcomes and alumni interests. However, comparisons can be made between results of the two surveys with regards to some questions that were purposefully mirrored with such intent.

Evaluation of SIT Study Abroad Ability to Satisfy Priorities

A very brief summary of how well the priorities are achieved based on alumni responses to the survey is included in this section. Firstly, it is difficult to accurately assess the academic rigor of the programs with the questions asked on this survey, but alumni reported significant academic impacts, and as many went on to pursue advanced degrees, often influenced by the issues explored on their study abroad program, it can be concluded that SIT Study Abroad is appropriate for students seeking an academically challenging and rigorous program, is appropriate for a variety of concentrations and can lead to a diverse range of career outcomes.

Undergraduate research in the form of the ISP, a hallmark of SIT programs, and part of what makes up the academically challenging curriculum, is a unique learning experience, as demonstrated by the data returned from the survey responses. Ninety percent of respondents indicated that the Independent Study Project (ISP) had a significant impact on their overall study abroad experience. Many alumni specifically mentioned the ISP's impact and repercussions through graduate school and into their career, details of which are included in the data presentation section of this paper.

Likewise, the cultural immersion that SIT strives to achieve seems to be a very successful component of the program design. Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated that "cultural immersion/cross-cultural communication" had a significant impact on their study abroad experience. In interviews and comments, alumni report that cultural immersion was present in almost every aspect of the program, from homestays, to the ISP, to the excursions and outings arranged outside the classroom, truly forming a thread that affected the entire experience. Alumni were not specifically asked about the experiential methodology used by SIT in this survey, but many referred to it in their responses independently, referencing the dynamism of the program and the importance of the learning that happened outside the classroom. From these responses, it can be concluded that

the experiential methodology resonated successfully with many participants as well, though it is difficult to quantify responses.

Reciprocity is very difficult to measure. However, some themes came across strongly in alumni comments about what they had learned and had taken with them as an approach to communication that has stayed with them long after the program in some cases. Ninety-seven percent of alumni responded positively (to some or to a large degree) when asked if their SIT Study Abroad experience had resulted in an increased respect for different perspectives. Specifically, alumni articulated having reached a realization that they were not there to improve situations of those in-country residents they met and interacted with during the program, but rather to listen and to learn about a way of life and worldview. This evokes the respect that is such a large part of the concept of reciprocity. Below are a series of student responses to various open-ended survey questions that articulate how their SIT program helped them to gain an understanding of the concept of reciprocity.

“The openness, adaptability, and importance of listening which I gained through SIT continues to impact my daily interactions.” (SIT Study Abroad Cameroon 2011 alumnus)

“I’m not very liberal if I’m not willing to listen and learn about other people and their ways of life. So that taught me a huge lesson about my identity. And I try to be more understanding and see things from other perspectives to try to understand people who I think are different than me.” (SIT Study Abroad Cameroon 2004 alumnus)

“...my experience collecting data for my ISP has informed the ways in which I collect information and interview clients and their families ...In particular, my commitment to encouraging collaboration and respecting the agency of my clients and their opinions and life experiences.” (SIT Study Abroad Mali 2003 alumnus)

SIT's commitment to diversity is made evident by the variety of international staff and faculty, as well as the speakers and presenters representing populations present in program countries. The survey was not appropriate for assessing a level of diversity within program participants, since demographics on gender, race, or on scholarships received were not collected, except those scholarships specific to study abroad. Finally, the stated priority of "global citizenship" can be partially assessed through alumni responses to questions on civic engagement. SIT Study Abroad alumni seem to engage in the activities queried at a high rate, consistent with the findings by the SAGE researchers (Fry, et al., 2009), including the fact that 90 percent of alumni claim to practice "voluntary simplicity," a term defined in the SIT Study Abroad alumni survey as:

...the effort to lead a more modest, simple lifestyle. Examples are riding a bike to work, taking a job that pays less but contributes more to the common good, or being motivated to use recycled products and to practice active recycling. It can also be defined as making conscious choices to consume less, work fewer hours, and acquire fewer possessions.

Responses to other relevant questions reflect the global citizenship that SIT is striving for as well, with 93 percent of alumni reporting that their experience changed their perspective on world affairs, and many alumni explaining in open-ended questions that they view and understand the world and global politics very differently after their SIT programs.

Presentation and analysis of data

Demographics

Though the alumni e-mails that SIT had in the system were not evenly distributed across the years, the response rate was fairly consistent by decade. To clarify, please see Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Size and Responses by Alumni Decade of Study

Decade	Sample by decade	responses	Percentage of total responses	Response rate per decade
1980-1989	317 (2%)	46	2%	15%
1990-1999	2617 (16%)	385	18%	15%
2000-2009	10151 (62%)	1281	61%	13%
2010-2011	3231 (20%)	395	19%	12%
totals	16316	2107	100%	13%

Among respondents, the median year of study abroad was 2005, nine years before the implementation of this survey. The average year represented was 2004, or ten years before the implementation of this survey. This is appropriate for a study on long-term outcomes and impacts. The top sending schools represented in responses to the survey are listed in Table 2. Institutions with the same rank were tied for that place.

Table 2

Top 13 Sending Institutions of Survey Respondents

College or University	Ranking by number of responses
Wesleyan University	1
The George Washington University	2
University of Colorado Boulder	3
Williams College	4
Carleton College	5
Macalester College	6
Brandeis University	7
Colby College	7
Brown University	8
Bates College	8
Washington University in St. Louis	9
Connecticut College	10
Cornell University	10

(N= 1,948)

These are all, with the exception of one (University of Colorado Boulder), ranked as “most competitive,” or highly selective institutions, when classified according to criteria developed by

Barron's Profiles of American Colleges (2009, as cited in Leonhardt, 2014). These are institutions that typically have more resources and higher graduation rates than those ranked as less competitive (Leonhardt, 2013). It must be taken into consideration that this is the demographic largely represented when sampling alumni of SIT Study Abroad programs. However, the wide variety of institutions represented, 316, is also noteworthy, as is the fact that responses are not heavily skewed towards the top responders; the top ranked school had 50 responses out of the total sample of 2,107. It is important to remember, also, that this is not a complete analysis of the top sending institutions for SIT Study Abroad, but rather a summary of the respondents to this survey.

When asked to indicate which country or countries in which participants had studied on their SIT program, responses included over 140 program destinations. Eleven countries make up almost half of the responses:

1. South Africa
2. Ecuador
3. Tanzania
4. Kenya
5. Australia
6. Chile
7. Brazil
8. Morocco
9. Madagascar
10. Switzerland
11. Cameroon

When divided into continents, 812 (39 percent) had studied abroad in Africa, 265 (13 percent) in Europe, 285 (14 percent) in Asia, 126 (6 percent) in Australia and Pacific Rim countries, and 511 (25 percent) in Central or South America, including Mexico. Thirty-nine (2 percent) had studied

abroad in the Middle East. Sixty-five respondents (3 percent) had participated in more than one program. Compared to data on the most popular countries for study abroad in 2012, this list contains more developing countries and the developing countries are more popular (IIE, 2013). The top ten leading destinations for U.S. study abroad students are the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, China, Germany, Australia, Costa Rica, Ireland, and Japan. Tanzania, Kenya, Morocco, Madagascar, Cameroon, and even Switzerland are not on the list of the top 25 countries as reported by IIE. South Africa, Ecuador, Australia, Chile, and Brazil do figure on the IIE list but are much farther down. As with the data on sending institutions, this is not a complete analysis of SIT Study Abroad's history of enrollment by program country and region, but rather a summary of survey responses.

Forty-one percent of respondents had studied abroad in some form before participating in an SIT program. A small number, six percent, had studied abroad already more than once. The likelihood of having studied abroad before participating in an SIT Study Abroad program increases by decade; that is, alumni of the 1980s and 1990s were slightly less likely to have studied abroad before their SIT program than alumni of the 2000s; 33 percent of alumni from the 1980s had studied abroad prior to SIT and 38 percent of alumni from the 1990s, compared with 41 percent of alumni from the 2000s. This is consistent with the trend identified by IES researchers, who found that three times as many students in the 1990s versus the 1950s and 1960s had studied abroad prior to their IES experience (Dwyer, 2004a, p. 17). It can be surmised that this is due to the increasing availability of high school students study abroad opportunities and gap-year programs.

The top undergraduate majors as reported by alumni fall into the following categories (listed in order from most to least). Twenty-five percent of respondents indicated double majors and so this list takes that into consideration; for example, if a student double majored in anthropology and

Africana studies, those would each be counted once. Counting this way, the top nine majors listed here account for 70 percent of the sample:

1. International Affairs/Relations/Studies
2. Anthropology
3. Political Science
4. Environmental studies
5. Biology
6. Language majors
7. Sociology
8. Area studies (i.e. South Asian studies, Africana studies)
9. History

These categories guided the data analysis when examining the variable of major on long-term outcomes.

In terms of educational attainment, the sample ranked much higher than U.S. national averages (see Table 3 for comparison). Unsurprisingly, since SIT Study Abroad offers programs only for students enrolled at accredited four-year institutions of higher learning, 97 percent of respondents hold at least a bachelor's degree. The numbers of those alumni who responded to the survey who hold advanced degrees is high, with 39 percent holding Master's Degrees and 11 percent holding terminal doctorate or professional degrees (Ph.D., Ed.D., J.D., M.D., etc.).

Table 3

SIT Study Abroad Alumni Educational Attainment as compared to U.S. Average

	SIT Study Abroad Alumni	U.S. Average-population over age 25
Bachelor's degree	97%	31%
Master's Degree	38.9%	8.05 %
Doctorate or Professional Degree	10.8%	3.07%

This means that 63 percent of SIT Study Abroad alumni, based on the survey responses, have enrolled in or earned any degree beyond a bachelor's degree. Even when counting only those who already hold a bachelor's degree, according to the statistics, about 27 of the U.S. population has earned a Master's. SIT Study Abroad alumni are well ahead of that at 39 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

This is consistent with findings of other researchers, who have found that study abroad alumni achieve bachelor's degrees and advanced degrees at higher rates than non-study abroad students, and tend to pursue internationally-oriented advanced degrees at higher rates as well (Rubin & Sutton, 2004; Dwyer, 2004b; Fry, et al., 2010).

It is difficult to compare the rates found in this study to those of each institution's alumni, which might reveal similar rates, simply because of the number of institutions represented in the sample. However, for example, 80 percent of alumni of Wesleyan University attend graduate or professional school within 5 years of graduation according to 2002 data (Ridout). In fact, 8 of the top 13 sending schools are ranked high as compared to other liberal arts colleges in terms of numbers of alumni who go on to pursue graduate degrees (Oberlin College, n.d.). This suggests that study abroad may not result in higher rates of educational attainment but rather is correlated positively for another reason, i.e. the same population that chooses to study abroad may be those that are motivated to pursue advanced degrees. However, this does reveal something about the demographic of the respondents.

The data indicate, though, that SIT Study Abroad alumni may earn advanced degrees and pursue internationally-oriented advanced degrees at higher rates than other study abroad alumni. See Table 4 for comparisons of educational attainments rates to other study abroad alumni.

Table 4

SIT Study Abroad Alumni Educational Attainment Rates Compared to Other Study Abroad Alumni

	SIT Study Abroad	IES survey (Dwyer, 2004a)	SAGE survey (Fry, et al. 2009)
Enrolled in or earned any degree beyond bachelors	63%	55%	61%
Internationally oriented advanced degree*	42%	No data on this point	35%

*in response to the question, Did/does your advanced degree include a study abroad or international experience?

The types of advanced degrees earned fall into 23 categories with the most reported degrees, Health/medicine, International relations/affairs/studies, and Education, representing 45 percent of all alumni responses. Table 5 lists the top eight categories of advanced degrees represented in survey responses, which constituted 95 percent of responses. The other 12 fields represented in survey responses were: Business/MBA, Arts, Anthropology, MSW, Psychology/Counseling, General science, Peacebuilding, Geography, Religion, Engineering, IT, and “Other.”

Table 5

Advanced Degrees Obtained by Alumni Survey Respondents

Field of Advanced Degree	Count	Percent of total
Health/Medicine	241	17.5%
International/Intercultural	203	14.7%
Education	174	12.6%
JD or other law-related degree	107	7.8%
Environmental Science, Conservation, or Ecology-related	95	6.9%
Liberal Arts	82	6.0%
MPA, MPP or nonprofit management	73	5.3%
Social Science (not Anthropology)	69	5.0%

Impacts and Outcomes: Academic, Personal, and Professional

It is clear from the data that an SIT Study Abroad program can have strong impacts with the potential to influence alumni's educational and career decisions that in turn affect the courses of their lives. The impacts are not limited to the international nature of the experience; often participants' outlook, attitudes, and worldview are influenced strongly by the SIT program design elements of experiential education and community-based research, which leads to a new approach to communication, a change or renewal of values, or other significant impacts. In these next two sections the data and resultant conclusions showing these impacts is presented.

In response to the question, "To what extent did your SIT Study Abroad experience influence your career choice?" 72 percent of responses were positive (to some or to a large degree). This is significantly higher than findings by Franklin (2008), who reported that 42 percent of Dickinson study abroad alumni reported that study abroad had influenced their career choice; it is markedly higher than the IES alumni study, which reported that 62 percent of alumni had the career direction influenced by study abroad (Norris and Norris, 2005, as cited in Franklin, 2010); also significantly higher than the SAGE study results, in which 56 percent of respondents indicated that study abroad influenced their career choice (Paige, Stallman, & Josić, 2008), and higher than Ostanina's findings of Central College study abroad alumni at 49 percent (2005, as cited in Franklin, 2010). Indeed, when the SIT Study Abroad alumni were isolated and compared to other respondents in the SAGE study, their response to this question was found to be significantly higher in that context as well, 76 percent as compared to 56 percent. The wording of the question was similar if not identical to phrasing used in these comparable studies. When the question is altered slightly, positive response is even higher: In response to the question, "To what extent did you gain a sense of social

responsibility or interest in social issues from your SIT Study Abroad experience that influenced your career choice?” 82 percent of responses were positive.

Areas of professional or career impact as reported by survey respondents include choice of field, specialization, or career sector. This includes gravitation towards the educational sector, towards work with an international or intercultural component, and towards public-service oriented professions. Typically, other study abroad alumni studies have not analyzed which sector dominates alumni’s career choices but rather quantify how many go into careers that are internationally oriented (i.e. Dwyer, 2004a; Dwyer, 2004b; Fry, et al. 2009). SIT Study Abroad alumni report in higher numbers that they work or have worked in an internationally oriented career or in a career with an international focus or component when compared with alumni data from the SAGE survey, coming in at 45 percent as compared to 38 percent (Fry, et al., 2009).

When asked, “In which career sector do you work (or have you worked)?” The top survey responses are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Top Career Sectors in Which Alumni Work (or Have Worked)

Higher Education instructor, administration, or research	33%
Education (Pre-K-12)	25%
Public health or Medicine/healthcare	25%
Nonprofit management	19%
Community and Social Services	15%
International Development	15%
Environment	14%

There were 36 categories total, so responses were widely distributed among the fields. Many respondents checked more than one response, which was encouraged. No other field garnered more

than 10 percent of responses, and fields other than the top fields averaged 5 percent of responses, so the top fields were significantly dominant over other survey choices.

From this data, it appears that SIT Study Abroad alumni pursue careers in the education sector in significantly high numbers, especially when compared to the general public. Fifty-eight percent of alumni responded that they work or have worked in higher education or K-12 education. When asked, “What is the name of your current employer?” 30 percent of respondents indicated some kind of educational institution. The 3 categories categorized as education by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a division of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), “educational services,” “state government – education” and “local government – education” together make up only 8 percent of the U.S. workforce. One study by Franklin (2010) found that out of 56 alumni, who were surveyed 10 years after studying abroad through Dickinson College, the largest employment sector represented was education, at 21 percent. In comparison, SIT Study Abroad alumni work or have worked in education in significantly higher numbers.

It is interesting to note that the combined category of public health/medicine/healthcare was one of the other top sectors of employment for SIT Study Abroad alumni since this is not part of the typical expectation of study abroad programs. Data is not widely available for chosen career sectors of other study abroad programs, but is available on the top fields of study for U.S. undergraduates who study abroad. According to IIE, “social sciences” is the top field of study for undergraduates (2013), represented by 23 percent of all U.S. students who study abroad (public health may fall into this category, but IIE does not specify whether or not this is the case in their Open Doors report). There is a sharp drop in numbers when it comes to “physical and life sciences” and “health sciences,” which also fall within the top six fields of undergraduate study for study abroad students, but are represented by only nine and six percent of undergraduates, respectively (IIE, 2013). SIT

Study Abroad students are not very different. Pre-med, public health, and biology majors all combined represent only 11 percent of alumni respondents to the survey. The fact that 25 percent of SIT Study Abroad alumni report that they work or have worked in the public health/medicine/healthcare fields may present some challenges to common perceptions about study abroad. In other words, data demonstrating that studying abroad as an undergraduate can indirectly or directly contribute constructively to a career in the medical field or health sciences may help to undermine prevailing perceptions that “the typical participant still is a white woman in the humanities or social sciences” (Fischer, 2010). Even though the most popular undergraduate major for SIT Study Abroad students was international affairs/studies/relations, the most commonly reported focus for advanced degrees achieved by alumni are degrees in the health and medical fields, representing 18 percent of all responses. The same is true if participants in health programs are isolated; for those students, international relations/affairs/studies was the most popular undergraduate major, but the health and medical fields dominate the advanced degrees at 20 percent of all responses from alumni of health programs.

The data suggest that SIT Study Abroad alumni are also well above the national average when it comes to working in the nonprofit sector. This is indicative of what SIT Study Abroad alumni might value (i.e. the common good over financial remuneration). According to a 2012 report by the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University, 10 percent of the U.S. population works in the nonprofit sector (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Geller), however, thirty-five percent of SIT Study Abroad alumni indicated that they work in the nonprofit or NGO sector.

A recent article in *Washington Monthly* defined public service as government or nonprofit jobs, and ranked U.S. liberal arts colleges and national universities by the rate at which their graduates enter into public service. Using this definition, adding together the NGO/nonprofit sector

and the government/public sector responses from SIT Study Abroad alumni shows that 55 percent of alumni are currently working in public service. The top 2 liberal arts colleges listed are the U.S. Naval Academy and West Point, with 89 percent and 87 percent of their alumni entering public service upon graduation, which is an extremely high rate, but these are members of a particular set, of course. The next highest-ranked liberal arts college has alumni who work in public service at a rate of 41 percent, and the highest ranked national university has alumni who enter into public service at a rate of 32 percent (Wenner, Dorsey, & Harris, 2013). SIT Study Abroad alumni, when compared with alumni of the institutions featured in this article, exhibit an unusually high propensity for working in the public service sector.

Another finding consistent with existing research was that participants in SIT Study Abroad programs reported having gained valuable experience that was helpful in advancing their academic and/or professional career. In response to the question, “Have you found your SIT Study Abroad experience to be useful in employment interviews?” 72 percent of responses were positive. Many alumni specifically mentioned their research experience (Independent Study Project, or ISP) and/or the location of the program as being attractive to interviewers. The following are quotes from alumni in which they articulate the value of their ISP experience or their program location in response to open-ended survey questions.

“My SIT experience in field research helped me gain admission to a very good doctoral program, and skills acquired during the experience were invaluable when I finally conducted research abroad to complete my doctoral program. Having international experience as part of my education has also been invaluable in the job market.” (SIT Study Abroad Niger 1992 alumnus)

“It's definitely an interesting and attractive line on my resume. Even if it's not directly related to jobs that I'm applying for, employers have often asked about it and have been interested in hearing about my ISP project. I think it helps demonstrate my ability to navigate new situations and be self-directed in completing a major project.” (SIT Study Abroad China 2009 alumnus)

“I love being able to share that I have "street cred" from having lived in Nicaragua. It's not exactly where everyone flocks during college and it helps me create bonds with my colleagues from Latin America.” (SIT Study Abroad Nicaragua 2000 alumnus)

“Employers have asked specifically about my SIT experience when they see it on my resume because they find it more unusual and interesting.” (SIT Study Abroad Ghana 2003 alumnus)

“Honestly, every interview I've ever had has commented on the study abroad in Oman. It helps to portray me as adventurous, open-minded and serious all at the same time. Beyond being an amazing academic experience, it's really just an excellent conversation starter, sometimes I think people call me for interviews just because they want to ask about it.” (SIT Study Abroad Oman 2005 alumnus)

“I include my SIT abroad experience, and the work that I did as a direct result of the program (volunteering for the Badia Research and Development Centre) on my resume for all job applications.” (SIT Study Abroad Jordan 2008 alumnus)

“I list my ISP, and the summer internship I did after the program (with an organization I connected to through the program) proudly on my resume. I've had about a dozen job and internship interviews since that time and I have been asked about those experiences every time.” (SIT Study Abroad Mexico 2008 alumnus)

“My very first job connected directly with (my) ISP.... My experiences there definitely helped in the interview process.” (SIT Study Abroad Kenya 2007 alumnus)

“The field research experience gained during my studies abroad has been highly influential in securing positions in graduate programs, and has differentiated me from other candidates during job interviews.” (SIT Study Abroad Samoa 2008 alumnus)

The ISP was also specifically cited by many respondents as the part of the program that provided participants with valuable skills and/or interests that they still use and apply today. The following quotes provide examples.

“The autonomy required for the ISP has influenced me greatly in being self-directive in my professional and academic career.” (SIT Study Abroad Ireland 1996 alumnus)

“My ISP has shaped my career. I studied the effect of programs at drop in centers for street children. I continue to work in a related field and plan on pursuing a masters in social work in the fall because of it.” (SIT Study Abroad South Africa 2011 alumnus)

“I continued to do ethnographic research after the program and have used those interviewing and interpersonal skills into my social work practices and community organizing work.” (SIT Study Abroad Ireland 1996 alumnus)

“I ... use the skills I attained through my work in Kenya to connect with my patients on a deep level every day.” (SIT Study Abroad Kenya 2009 alumnus)

“The training we were provided in doing anthropological/sociology interviews by the director of our in country program have been invaluable.” (SIT Study Abroad Nepal 1983 alumnus)

“My ISP was a life-changing experience. Not only was I able to develop my own research question, but I had learned the tools to collect and report findings. I used my new language skills, although rudimentary, to interview people in the community, health care providers, and other relevant stakeholders.” (SIT Study Abroad Greece 1998 alumnus)

“SIT introduced me to qualitative field research and the notion of a symbiotic relationship between outside researchers and community members. I learned how to discover research possibilities based on my personal experiences, how to connect with people, how to interview, code, etc. It has helped me immensely in my coursework and research in [my current position].” (SIT Study Abroad South Africa 2010 alumnus)

It is difficult to separate the professional from the academic when it comes to the choice to attend graduate school and the subsequent impact on career. The choice of what field to pursue in graduate school is often a reflection of or heavy influence on career goals. Seventy-five percent of alumni found their SIT Study Abroad experience useful in applications or interviews for graduate programs, and 64 percent of alumni reported that their SIT Study Abroad experience influenced their decision to pursue an advanced degree, a rate of positive response consistent with data from the SAGE and the IES studies (Fry, et al., 2009; Dwyer, 2004a).

Many alumni reported that their experience led to their pursuit of a particular graduate degree, and that degree has enabled them to work in their chosen field. This is especially relevant when a participant is able to carry on their ISP research through graduate school and beyond. Overall, when asked “To what extent have you continued to engage with issues you explored with your ISP?” 59 percent of alumni responded positively, a rate that was somewhat pleasantly surprising. Here are some examples of survey responses that show how alumni continued to engage with their ISP topic.

“The community I worked with during my ISP invited me to return and continue my research... I am now doing this as part of my PhD.” (SIT Study Abroad Ghana 2009 alumnus)

“My ISP project was the first time that I conducted an ethnographic interview project, and I have continued to build on that foundation. My undergraduate thesis and Fulbright work were also interview-based projects. In graduate school I conducted a survey-based study. I am now working as a fisheries social science researcher at [current company], focused on Alaska issues, and we are using survey and interview research methods.” (SIT Study Abroad Panama 2002 alumnus)

“The ISP set the trajectory for the work I love and will continue throughout my career.” (SIT Study Abroad Kenya 2007 alumnus)

Some other findings are consistent with the general professional benefits reported in other studies. When asked about the use of foreign languages in their daily work, 627 alumni (30 percent) responded that they use a language other than English daily, a rate consistent with the results of the IES study (Dwyer, 2004a). Without having gained the language skills learned while abroad, some alumni reported doubting that they would ever be in their current jobs, especially those living or working abroad, but also those working with immigrant populations or in international organizations based in the United States. However, some alumni report that they would love to continue working in a field or a country they enjoyed very much while on their study abroad program, but they have not been able to do so for financial or other practical reasons. So, they remain motivated and inspired by their experience, but are currently frustrated by their inability to translate their passion for their experience into a paycheck.

It must be noted that some alumni made clear in their responses that the main impact on their life was not academic or professional, but rather in the value of the relationships that they formed

and what increased or decreased in importance in their lives. Though it is clearly challenging to articulate, alumni explain that the real value of the experience for them lay in the change in environment that caused them to re-evaluate their own values and beliefs, and the challenges that the environment and activities provided that led to increased confidence and independence. While increased confidence and independence are consistent with the personal benefits demonstrated by other studies (i.e., Dwyer, 2004b), the change in *values* is something that has not been widely explored, except by the SAGE team (Fry, et al., 2009, 2010) in terms of study abroad alumni and propensity for civic engagement. One way to assess changes in alumni values can be found in the responses to one of the survey questions. For example, when asked to what extent their study abroad experience had “changed or influenced the political views you hold today?” 63 percent of SIT Study Abroad alumni responded positively. However, the explanations from alumni are more powerful than the quantitative data when assessing this potential impact. Below are some samples of alumni responses that specifically mention how their study abroad experience affected or impacted their values.

“...it makes you question the capitalist / materialistic way you live.” (SIT Study Abroad Spain 1998 alumnus)

“I have always been humbled by the happiness displayed in developing nations by those who have so little in our monetary standards. I've tried to pass this on to my children at every chance.” (SIT Study Abroad Mexico 1993 alumnus)

“I was no longer comfortable with the way most people engage with consumerism and community, and as such felt called to radically challenge the status quo within my own life and those around me.” (SIT Study Abroad India 2007 alumnus)

One final interesting outcome is that just over 30 respondents (3 percent) cited their SIT experience as being one of the reasons they joined the Peace Corps, which has affected their career and life choices in many ways since. There was no specific question in the survey about the Peace Corps, so this information was provided voluntarily; it may be that more alumni than 3 percent followed this path. With the focus that SIT provides on exploring inequalities and working in developing countries, this may be an avenue for further research.

Analysis by different factors: major, program country, program focus.

With information available in the returned survey data about alumni's undergraduate major, country of study, and other variables that have been shown in previous studies to impact study abroad alumni in the long term, analysis using these additional factors was done to investigate any significant difference in results.

The analysis by major is comparable to the research that DeGraaf, D., Slagter, C., Larsen, K., Ditta, E. published in 2013, whereby Spanish majors reported a higher impact on career goals and choices than did business majors after study abroad. In response to the question, "To what extent did your SIT Study Abroad experience influence your career choice?" alumni responded positively at a rate of 72 percent (to some extent or to a large extent). Some undergraduate majors had higher positive rates of response; alumni who had majored in a language responded positively at a rate of 77 percent; anthropology majors at a rate of 79 percent; environmental studies/science majors at a rate of 80 percent; and international affairs/studies/relations majors gave the most positive responses, at 82 percent. English majors responded at a lower rate of 66 percent. All of these differences were found to be statistically significant. Other majors (e.g. biology, political science, sociology, area studies, and history) were not found to differ significantly in alumni response to this question on career impacts. This is interesting, and the reasons for this are not known, but one might surmise that

a student majoring in biology already has career plans before studying abroad, whereas those in other majors might be more likely to be undecided. However, this is only conjecture. This information may be useful to illustrate the wide variety of subjects in which a student can major and find study abroad to be a benefit rather than a detractor from their studies or career goals.

In response to the question, “To what extent did you gain a sense of social responsibility or interest in social issues from your SIT Study Abroad experience that influenced your career choice?” to which the overall response rate was quite high, at 82 percent, the only significant difference found was in the response rate from anthropology majors, at 87 percent. Otherwise, with such a high positive response already, most other majors were very close to the same mark.

When impacts were analyzed by program country, some significant differences were found. Countries of study were classified as either developing or developed using the International Monetary Fund (IMF) country rankings (2012). In response to the question, “To what extent did your SIT Study Abroad experience influence your career choice?” those alumni who had studied abroad in developing countries responded positively at a significantly higher rate (77 percent) than did those who studied in a developed country (65 percent). Alumni who had studied in Africa or in Central or South America responded at significantly higher rates (77 percent and 76 percent, respectively) than did those alumni who had studied in Western Europe, Central or Eastern Europe, Australia, or the Middle East with the latter regions corresponding to significantly lower rates to the question on career influence when compared with the overall average, as well. This is consistent with the findings of the SAGE study in which the researchers concluded that those alumni who had participated in study abroad programs in developing countries reported being more globally engaged, and reported that study abroad had had more of an impact (Fry, et al., 2010). The SAGE researchers focused on global engagement as an outcome, but were clear that “the variable with the

highest explanatory power and by far the greatest size effects was consistently program depth” (Fry, et al., 2010, p. 6), and that “programs in non-traditional parts of the world are likely to have more depth and be less shallow than programs in traditional study abroad locations” (p. 2).

It must be noted with regard to this regional comparison that there were only 35 respondents who had studied in the Middle East. Such a small sample size is not useful for drawing conclusions about all program alumni. Also, though alumni of Middle Eastern program countries responded at a lower rate to the question listed, they responded at a higher rate when compared to the average to the question, “To what extent did you gain a sense of social responsibility or interest in social issues from your SIT Study Abroad experience that influenced your career choice?”

Because the research done by Thurber in 1998 on SIT Study Abroad alumni revealed that alumni of programs in Nepal seemed to have a slightly stronger connection to their host country than other alumni surveyed; a few countries, including Nepal, were isolated for their alumni’s reported impact on career choice. Alumni of any program that included Nepal, even as only one of multiple countries visited (for example, the Tibetan studies program included India, Nepal, and Tibet) responded to the question on study abroad and its influences on career choice at a significantly high rate of 80 percent, and alumni of programs in Bolivia (another country that is often anecdotally referred to as very impactful) responded at a high rate as well, at 77 percent.

The quantitative discrepancies are interesting, but the qualitative responses can often tell more of the story. The responses to open-ended questions on academic, career, and life impacts from alumni of the Nepal program often reference a change to participants’ values and goals, often engendering a new understanding or rejection of the pursuit of material wealth. Below are some sample survey responses articulating this phenomenon.

“Inspired...a change in the way I view balance and success in my life.” (SIT Study Abroad Tibetan Studies 2006 alumnus)

“I was no longer comfortable with the way most people engage with consumerism and community, and as such felt called to radically challenge the status quo within my own life and those around me.” (SIT Study Abroad Tibetan studies 2007 alumnus)

Alumni of Bolivia programs also commented on how their experience caused them to reflect on consumerism, but those alumni also had more to say specifically about the strong connection they forged with the community and how special a place Bolivia had become to them. The references to ISPs and career connections were more frequent with alumni of Bolivian programs than with those who had studied in Nepal.

“Following college, I started working for a think tank on US-Latin American policy and focused particularly on education policy in Latin America. I attribute much of my ability to secure that job to the foundations I gained during my SIT study abroad experience.” (SIT Study Abroad Bolivia 2002 alumnus)

“I definitely think about consumerism differently after my SIT program, especially due to my ISP project.” (SIT Study Abroad Bolivia 2010 alumnus)

One additional variable that was analyzed within the survey data was the program theme, specifically, investigating whether alumni of health-themed programs exhibited or self-reported any unique outcomes. The short answer is yes. Quantitatively speaking, alumni of these programs responded positively in significantly higher numbers to the question, “To what extent did your experience with SIT Study Abroad influence your career choice?” at a rate of 78 percent as compared to the 72 percent average. When alumni of health programs were asked to indicate the field in which they are currently working, the health fields dominate the sample at 39 percent,

closely followed by education which is at 30 percent. Alumni of the health programs also went on to pursue health- and medically-related advanced degrees at a higher rate than any other advanced degree, including M.D. and M.P.H. degrees, for example; and 99 percent of alumni of health programs have pursued or achieved an advanced degree at this point, an incredibly high number.

Alumni of programs that were environment- or ecology- themed showed similarly significant impacts. For alumni of these programs, the top employment sector as indicated in survey responses is the environmental sector. Alumni of environmentally- or ecologically-focused programs tended to pursue advanced degrees in high numbers consistent with the average survey results, with 62 percent having earned an advanced degree; and the most popular field for advanced degree was environmental/ecology focused. The impact of health- and environmentally-themed programs appears to be significant in ways that differ from other SIT Study Abroad programs and may bear further investigation. Moreover, since health and pre-med study abroad programs and environmental programs are considered niche programs in the international education arena, publicizing their alumni's impacts, outcomes, and career paths may help to increase enrollment numbers in these types of programs, or at the very least change common misperceptions about their professional applicability.

Indeed, investigating the level of impact and type of impact by program destination and by other variables is a topic that bears further research and analysis on more variables than just career impacts, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Interviews

An additional eight alumni were contacted for follow-up interviews, in order to assess how they would articulate, when given the opportunity to do so at length, the impacts of their SIT Study Abroad experience on their academic and career choices. Care was taken to select two interview subjects from each decade (the 1980s, the 1990s, the 2000s, and two alumni from 2011), and in each

decade, to choose one participant of a program that took place in Western Europe, and one that took place in a developing country.

Some alumni drew direct connections between their study abroad experience and their current career during the interview. Brent B. studied abroad in England in 1989, attended graduate school for international relations directly after college, and for the past twenty years has worked for the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, facilitating student exchange, citizen diplomacy and cross-cultural communication. Not every career path has been as linear. What is striking is that Brent directly credited his interest in his work to his study abroad experience and categorized his semester abroad as a major turning point in his life, having changed his focus from domestic politics to international and intercultural relations.

In contrast, one alumna, Jami N., worked for over ten years in a study abroad office, but claimed that her SIT Study Abroad experience had not been a turning point for her, in fact, it has not served her much since her experience, except that studying abroad in general is a requirement for working in the field of international education. She studied French but never uses it, she never again engaged with her ISP topic, and she wishes she had studied in a developing country instead of Switzerland. Jami's career choice reflects interests and values she held before going abroad.

Another alumna, Sally S., who studied in Germany in 1985, felt that her experience affected her choices—for example, she earned an advanced degree in cultural studies, but it did not fundamentally change her worldview the way that alumni of programs in developing countries articulated their experience had done. She now works at a university doing grants administration work, which she has been doing for the last 14 years, and she champions international experiences whenever she can but is not directly involved in supporting international education, exchange, or

development work. She could be categorized more as someone who looks back very fondly on her study abroad experience and finds it valuable in retrospect as an educational opportunity.

Katherine M. and Andree S., who both studied in developing countries, Cameroon and Uganda, respectively, reported extremely strong impacts on their career interests and in fact are still engaged with issues they explored during their programs. The conversations with these two alumnae were powerful reminders of just how much of an impact a program in a more challenging environment can be. Both are working in international development now and were directly influenced to seek out employment in their fields as a result of their time in their program countries; both women felt that their experiences were indispensable in obtaining their first positions in their career path that led them to where they are today.

The conclusion should not be drawn that every alumna/us of a program in a developing country goes into international development work, and luckily the interview with Phoebe F. provided a balance; she was extraordinarily positive about her experience in Cameroon and its transformation of her worldview, as well as the interest in different issues it had fostered for her, but for Phoebe, the real impact was the passion she found for interviewing through her ISP research. She now aspires to work in journalism and is currently working at NPR in Austin, hoping to get the chance to explore issues of socio-economic factors and the history of oppression in diverse communities.

From the interviews, a more nuanced understanding of the extremely diverse impacts of a study abroad experience is revealed. Hearing someone's full story often makes themes more difficult to identify and experiences more difficult to categorize. However, each interview participant spoke very positively about their experience, though some saw more definitive connections than others between their study abroad experience and their career goals and paths. Studying in a developing

country did seem to have more of an impact on interview participants. In each person, a lifelong respect for international and intercultural communication and the inherent challenges and lessons learned therein was born and remains to this day.

Conclusion

This study was conceived with a goal of broadly exploring the long-term impacts and outcomes of SIT Study Abroad programs on alumni. Additional goals included exploring whether or not SIT's unique program features, such as programming in developing countries and the research component of the curriculum, had additional or different impacts when compared with similar research. From the survey results, it can be concluded that SIT Study Abroad has had a strong impact on alumni in terms of personal, academic, and career impacts, as well as professional applicability, and in some cases, demonstrating stronger impacts than other studies of non-SIT study abroad have reported. Furthermore, the design of the program serves to further the program and organizational priorities, stated as academic quality, safety and security, diversity, reciprocity, and global citizenship (SIT Study Abroad 2014 Course Catalog, 2013).

Consistent with existing study abroad alumni studies, SIT Study Abroad alumni work in internationally-focused jobs in high numbers and use foreign languages in the workplaces at a high rate. Alumni of SIT Study Abroad programs are employed in the nonprofit, educational, and medical and health sectors in very high numbers, perhaps indicating a greater concern for and commitment to the common good than non-study abroad participants. It is true that the demographics of students who participate in these programs must be taken into account when examining their career choices, as the outcomes cannot be attributed exclusively to their study abroad experience. Alumni self-report the impacts in high numbers, however. Eighty-two percent report that they gained a sense of social responsibility or social issues from their SIT experience that influenced their career choice. Seventy-

two percent indicated that their experience was helpful in job interviews and articulated how and in what way.

Contrary to some perceptions about study abroad, the program has not detracted from participants' academic careers. Survey respondents have pursued and achieved advanced degrees at a very high rate, and alumni of SIT's health-themed programs achieve advanced degrees at the rate of almost 100 percent.

Alumni of health-themed programs and of environmentally/ecologically-themed programs were specifically analyzed in order to assess any differences in their results, and the programs' professional applicability and the alumni's reported career influence was striking with regard to these two groups. Alumni of health programs reported that their study abroad had much higher rate of influence on career choice than the overall alumni average; their career choices are dominated by the health/medical fields; and they earned advanced degrees at a higher rate than the alumni average, with almost 100 percent reporting having earned an advanced degree. Their choices of advanced degree were overwhelmingly health and medically related as well. Alumni of environmental or ecologically-themed programs work in high numbers in the environmental sector and also pursued advanced degrees at a higher rate than the alumni average, with environmental and ecological degrees dominating their choice of advanced degree. These data show the academic and professional applicability of some of SIT Study Abroad's uniquely themed programs which represent a niche offering in the international education field.

Those who studied in a developing country report an even greater rate of career and personal impacts than do alumni of developed countries. Quantitative and qualitative data indicate that alumni of programs in African countries experienced reported significantly higher rates of career, academic,

and personal impacts. Some other specific countries such as Nepal, Bolivia, and Cameroon also appear to result in especially strong impacts on their participants.

Overall, the professional applicability of the ISP experience was a clear theme in survey responses. This research can be added to the growing pool of existing data on positive career outcomes and impacts that are connected with study abroad in general, and this data demonstrates the additional usefulness and benefits of an international undergraduate research experience. Given the alumni comments that explained to what extent and in what specific ways the ISP influenced participants' career paths; as well as its reported value when listed on a resume and the usefulness of the experience during interviews, it appears to be an extremely valuable component of SIT Study Abroad programming in terms of long-term impacts. The ISP experience seemed especially applicable to certain graduate programs, and to many diverse fields of employment, as alumni articulated and as this report details. It may be that the research conducted by participants of SIT programs as their required Independent Study Project (ISP) is comparable in value in terms of career development to that of internships on other study abroad programs.

The results of the study, particularly regarding the professional applicability of the ISP experience, are especially relevant today. Between 1968 and 1998, the goals of undergraduate students in the United States changed dramatically, evolving from "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" to "becoming very well off financially" (Bronner, 1998, as cited in Orahood, et al., 2004). A 2003 study by Adams, Stivers and Bin revealed that American undergraduates placed the highest value on gaining "information I can use" (as cited in Orahood, et al., p. 119). This increasing focus on practical applicability of college courses and experiences can sometimes be detrimental to perceptions of study abroad, combatting said perceptions being a plausible explanation for recent research trends focusing on career and academic outcomes of study abroad

participants. In addition to existing research on career benefits of international experiences as profiled in this paper, the U.S. Department of Education released an international strategy in 2012 that speaks to the importance of international education and the “value and necessity of global competencies for all students” (2012, p. 1). This research can be added to the existing pool of positive career outcomes and impacts that are connected with study abroad in general, and this data demonstrates the additional professional applicability and benefits of an international undergraduate research experience.

Recommendations for further research

The amount of data returned from the survey, as well as the number of alumni willing to be contacted for further conversations regarding their experience, provides ample opportunity for further exploration and analysis. In addition to the variables explored and reported in this paper, outcomes could be analyzed by every program, by every country, by every program theme, etc. The data would benefit from supplementation from additional case studies, that is, pursuing more interviews with a diverse group of alumni. Additionally, any information that can be obtained from sending schools, or even participation from sending schools in terms of surveying a control group of their non-study abroad alumni, would lend credence to the results, though this would be a challenge that SIT likely does not have the staff, time, or money to pursue at this time. It would be helpful to compare SIT Study Abroad alumni career outcomes with those of alumni from sending schools, to analyze any differences or similarities.

Further research is also recommended in general on the demographic and motivational differences in program participants prior to applying to an SIT Study Abroad program, both in how participants differ from non-study abroad participants but how they may differ from program to

program as well. The outcomes must partially be credited to participants' pre-existing interests and goals.

When students with the demographic makeup of those who enroll in SIT Study programs choose to study abroad, and when the programs are administered with the priorities and hallmark features incorporated by SIT Study Abroad such as undergraduate research, a focus on reciprocity, and programs in developing countries, the potential for impacts is deep and lasting. This data should be disseminated and shared with the larger World Learning and SIT Study Abroad community as well as with the greater international education community.

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Appendix 1: Survey text

SIT Study Abroad Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes Research Project

Section 1: Demographics

Year studied abroad:

Country or countries of SIT program:

- Not counting leisure travel (vacations, etc.); did you participate in any study abroad in high school or college before participating in an SIT Study Abroad program? Please check all that apply.
 - Yes, I studied abroad in high school for a year or semester
 - Yes, I did a summer study abroad program in high school for two weeks or more
 - Yes, I did a “gap year” program for a semester or year, or traveled internationally on my own time for more than six weeks total, before enrolling in college
 - Yes, I studied abroad in college for a semester, year, summer, or winter term program prior to participating in SIT Study Abroad
 - No, this was my first study abroad experience

- If you studied abroad in high school, was it through the Experiment in International Living (EIL) or any other World Learning international or exchange programs?
 - Yes, I am an EIL alumna/us
 - Yes, I participated in another World Learning program (please indicate which): _____
 - N/A (I did not study abroad, or if I did it was not through WL)

- Were you a member of the honors college at your undergraduate institution?
 - Yes
 - No

- Please indicate whether you received any of these scholarships specific to study abroad (in addition to other financial aid):
 - Boren Scholarship for undergraduate study
 - Gilman Scholarship (Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE))
 - Freeman-ASIA Scholarship (Freeman Awards for Study In Asia, administered by IIE)
 - Scholarship from SIT Study Abroad (for example, Pell Grant match)
 - I did not receive any scholarships specific to study abroad
 - Other study abroad - specific scholarship (please indicate)

Section 2: Academics and Research

1. Please indicate your undergraduate major and degree (for example, B.A., French Language and Literature):

2. SIT Study Abroad students typically complete an Independent Study Project (ISP) consisting of in-depth, field-based research as part of their program requirements. The ISP can address a formulated research question, incorporate artwork or a performance, or consist of a practicum (service or internship). The following questions refer to the research project that many students complete. If you completed community research and wrote a paper about it, but you don't recall that it was specifically called an "ISP", you will have the option to skip the related questions.

Did you complete a research project and paper, called ISP or by another name, during your SIT Study Abroad program?

- Yes
- No (if no, use survey logic to skip next two questions.)

Please rate to what extent the research and paper provided you with useful skills and knowledge in research methodology.	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	
Please rate to what extent SIT Study Abroad provided you with an understanding of the ethics of research.	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	
Please rate to what extent SIT Study Abroad provided you with an understanding of the relationship between field-based research and reciprocity.	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	
Please rate to what extent your senior thesis at your home institution was a continuation of the ISP or other research conducted while on an SIT Study Abroad program.	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A (did not complete senior thesis)

3. After college, did you receive any grants or fellowships to fund international academic research? If so, please indicate which grant or program:

- The Fulbright Scholar Program
- The Watson Fellowship
- Davis Projects for Peace
- A Gilman Scholarship
- Other (please specify): _____
- I did not receive a grant or fellowship to conduct international academic research (if this is selected, use survey logic to skip next question.)

4. If so, was the research conducted during the fellowship in any way related to or a continuation of issues explored or research conducted on your SIT Study Abroad program?

To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
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5. Have you published or present any of your research from your SIT Study Abroad program? If so, please tell us where:

6. Please rate, to the best of your ability, to what extent each component of your SIT program impacted your overall study abroad experience:

Program component	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Academic director/SIT faculty member guidance/mentorship and/or relationship	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Cultural immersion/cross-cultural communication	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Host family stay	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Language study/language practice	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Critical social issues examined through program curriculum	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Relationships formed with fellow students on trip	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
ISP (Research project)	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Location-specific knowledge acquired through course content, lectures, and structured excursions	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Volunteering in the host community or country	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
Please fill in any other component of your program that is not listed here that you found impactful: -----	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A

7. What is the highest level of education you have attained to date?

- 4- year undergraduate degree (B.A., B.S., etc.) (if this is the case, use survey logic to skip to #12)
- Master's (M.A., M.S, M.B.A., M.F.A., M.P.A., LL.M., M.L.S., etc.)
- J.D.
- M.D.

- Ph.D., D.Phil., Ed.D, Psy. D., etc.
- Other (please indicate:)
- I am currently pursuing a degree: (please indicate degree/field of study)

8. In which field did you earn your advanced degree?

9. Did your advanced degree include a study abroad or international experience?
Yes/no

10. Did you find your SIT Study Abroad experience to be useful in applications or interviews for graduate programs?

To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
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11. To what extent did your experience with SIT Study Abroad influence your decision to pursue an advanced degree?

To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A
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12. Have you earned an advanced degree through SIT Graduate Institute or are you currently enrolled there? If so, please indicate the degree you earned or are working towards:

- Yes, name of degree: _____
- No, I did not attend SIT Graduate Institute

13. Please tell us anything additional you would like to share about how your SIT Study Abroad experience has influenced your academic trajectory (or how you envision it influencing it in the future):

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Section 3: Personal Development and Intercultural Learning Outcomes

14. To what extent did your participation and experience on an SIT Study Abroad program:

Result in an increased respect for different perspectives; or in other words, increase the likelihood that you would listen to or consider the perspective or opinion of someone very different from you?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Increase your understanding of varied domestic and international social issues, and the mechanisms by which they are created and perpetuated?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Change your perspective on world affairs?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Increase your understanding around issues of social, economic and/or political inequity?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Increase your understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in international development work?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
affect or impact the host community(ies) in which you lived and/or studied?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Change or influence the political views you hold today?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Give you a new or renewed awareness of your own cultural biases? (For example, an awareness of the effects that your native culture has on your perspective and communication style.)	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Contribute to an increased ability to see your country through the lens of another culture?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Result in an increased ability to work effectively with others in groups or teams?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Increase your self -confidence i.e. faith in your own ability to navigate challenging or potentially challenging situations?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Contribute to your development of or clarification of a personal code of values and ethics?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
Do you consider fellow SIT Study Abroad alumni to be relevant professional and/or personal contacts today?	Yes	No		

Have you remained in contact with any of the following?

- Host family
- In-country academic advisor
- SIT in-country Academic Director or faculty member
- Other host country nationals from your SIT experience

15. If you studied abroad again or lived abroad after returning from your SIT Study Abroad program, for what length of time (all combined) did you work, live, or volunteer abroad? Please indicate the number of years:

16. We would like to know about your continued engagement with your SIT program country or countries.

- I have returned for a visit
- I have returned for multiple visits
- I work or live in the country where I studied abroad
- I have raised money for the host community or support it in another way
- I have continued to engage with organization(s) with which I worked during my SIT program
- I worked on or work on a project or organization that is directly connected to the country of my SIT Study Abroad program

Please use this space to explain any other way in which you have remained engaged with your SIT program country or countries: (optional)

Section 4: Career Impacts

17. Please tell us about what you currently do for a living:

- I work in the private sector
- I work in the non-profit/NGO sector
- I work for the government/in the public sector
- I am a student
- I am self-employed
- I am not currently employed, nor am I a student

18. In which career sector do you work (or have you worked)? You may check all that apply.

- Architecture, Arts and Design
- Agriculture
- Arts and Entertainment
- Civil Service

- Community and Social Services
- Education (Pre-K-12)
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
- Food services and Preparation
- Foreign Service and Diplomacy
- Higher Education - instructor
- Higher Education – administration
- Higher Education – research
- Environment
- Finance
- Internet/Information Technology
- International Development
- Law/Legal
- Life, Physical, or Social Sciences
- Management or Consulting
- Marketing and/or Public Relations
- Medicine/Healthcare
- Military
- Political or Community Organizing
- Public Administration
- Public Health or Social Assistance
- Sports/Physical Fitness
- Sales
- Social Work
- Stay at home parent
- Student
- Telecommunications
- Transportation
- Unemployed, seeking employment
- Unemployed, not currently seeking employment
- Wholesale or Retail
- Other (please specify)

19. Name of current employer

20. Job title

21. Are you engaged in work that has an international focus or component (for example, your job requires you to travel, you communicate frequently with colleagues in other countries, you work to support people from other countries in the U.S., your work is directly related to international development or international education, etc.)?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

22. Please rate the following:

To what extent did your SIT Study Abroad experience influence your career choice?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A (I'm not working yet)
To what extent did you gain a sense of social responsibility or interest in social issues from your SIT Study Abroad experience that influenced your career choice?	To a large degree	To some degree	very little	Not at all	N/A
Have you found your SIT Study Abroad experience to be useful in employment interviews?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A

Was knowledge of a foreign language or another culture helpful in obtaining your current job or any job that you have held since studying abroad?	To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all	N/A (I am not working and have never interviewed for a job)
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23. Do you currently use a foreign language in your daily work? If so, please indicate which one(s):

 2nd language? _____

public official								
Supported philanthropic (fundraising) initiatives								
Volunteered my time in support of a community or social issue								

28. My level of involvement in the above **domestic** activities was influenced by my study abroad experience:

To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
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29. My level of involvement in the above **international** activities was influenced by my study abroad experience:

To a large degree	To some degree	Very little	Not at all
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Section 6: Voluntary Simplicity

We define voluntary simplicity as the effort to lead a more modest, simple lifestyle. Examples are riding a bike to work, taking a job that pays less but contributes more to the common good, or being motivated to use recycled products and to practice active recycling. It can also be defined as making conscious choices to consume less, work fewer hours, and acquire fewer possessions.

30. Please complete the following statement: "I practice voluntary simplicity:

- To a large degree
- To some degree
- Very little
- Not at all

31. To what degree did your study abroad experience influence you to practice voluntary simplicity?

- To a large degree
- To some degree
- Very little
- Not at all

Section 7: Study Abroad and Reciprocity: Social Responsibility

32. Have you ever influenced an organization (non-profit or for-profit) from within to be more socially responsible? If so, please indicate to what extent?

- To a large degree
- To some degree
- Very little

- Not at all
- 33.** To what extent did your study abroad experience influence your commitment to promote social responsibility in that organization?
 - To a large degree
 - To some degree
 - Very little
 - Not at all

34. Please share any more information you would like to provide about the general impact of your SIT Study Abroad experience on your life. We are particularly interested in how the experience affected your identity and/or values, if this applies to you, and what effect that change may have had on subsequent choices.

35. Would you be willing to speak further to someone about your experience with SIT Study Abroad?
Y/N

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Thank you very much for your time and effort in completing our survey. Your responses will provide SIT Study Abroad with valuable information that may be used to demonstrate the long-term impact of our programs, as well as provide us with information that may help us to improve our current programs. We will be happy to share the results of the survey with all respondents when we have compiled a full report. We hope you will stay in touch with SIT Study Abroad by liking our [Facebook page](#), following the [SIT Study Abroad blog](#), and joining the [World Learning Alumni group on Linked In](#).

If you have any comments or questions about this survey, please contact alumni@worldlearning.org.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. It says here that you traveled abroad as a child – can you tell me a little bit more about that? Any other exposure to international travel or ideas before college?
2. Can you tell me more about how your experience with SIT Study Abroad fit into your undergraduate academic experience?- (prompts: how you decided to study abroad, your major, etc?)
3. Can you give me some more details about your SIT Study Abroad experience? Do you remember the theme, focus or issues that you explored? What country did you visit? (just to help them recall their study abroad experience).
4. Many survey respondents have indicated that the cultural immersion was the most impactful of all the program elements. Is there a particular element of the program that you found to have a greater impact than any other, and if so, can you elaborate on that for me?
5. Did your study abroad experience in any way encourage you to narrow your focus or major on a path that was new to you? (did study abroad spark a passion in you for any academic discipline that you did not previously know you found interesting before your time abroad?)
6. Can you tell me a little bit more about the work that you do today, and if or how your study abroad experience contributed to your choice to work in a certain industry, choose a certain type of position? Can you talk a little bit about what else contributed to your career choice besides your study abroad experience? (If the study abroad experience influenced their personal values (based on response to values/ethics question on the survey) does their career choice reflect that?)

OR How you incorporated your study abroad experience into your career choice and/or life?

7. Anything else you would like to share about the impact of study abroad or any other subsequent life experiences?