

## Chapter 21

# Graduate Study Abroad: Student Learning, Pedagogy, and Outcomes

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### ABSTRACT

*Graduate-level study abroad represents an important and expanding dimension of efforts to internationalize Higher Education (HE) in the United States (US). Graduate study abroad represents a kind of learning experience that is informed by its location within graduate education. Using transformative learning theory, the authors conducted a qualitative study of 52 doctoral students who participated in study abroad programs in four countries. The findings suggest that students use multiple frames to make sense of these experiences and can be characterized as academic, relational, or deep. These frames reflect varying levels of engagement of the student's self, indicating a complex integration of the personal and professional in the study abroad experience. Analysis of narratives suggests that the dominant impact of the experiences was an expansion of the students' sociolinguistic awareness. Few students provided narratives indicating reflection on and questioning of their psychological frames of reference, suggesting possible constraints of the overall program design, pedagogy, or both.*

### INTRODUCTION

Internationalization continues to occupy the attention of administrators, faculty, and students in United States (US) Higher Education (HE). Outbound student mobility represents an important and highly popular form of this internationalizing effort. According to the 2014 'Open Doors Report', over the last 13 years the number of US students studying abroad in some form has steadily increased, from 154,168 during the 2000-2001 academic year to 289,408 for 2012-2013. The largest increase has, for the most

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part, occurred in programs less than eight weeks in duration (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). Although these changes largely represent increases in study abroad participation by undergraduate students, in recent years there has been increased attention to this phenomenon at the graduate-level as well.

While graduate students represent a relatively small proportion of the total number of students studying abroad, their proportion of the total has been steadily increasing, from about 8% in 2001-2002 to almost 14% of all students studying abroad in 2012-2013. In addition, the number of HE Institutions (HEIs) offering short-term study abroad experiences for graduate students has also increased, providing opportunities for students in law, medicine, education, social work, dentistry, business, and student affairs, among other disciplines (Sinclair, 2014).

In contrast to undergraduate study abroad, the scholarship of graduate study abroad is very limited. Despite increases in numbers of programs and participants, relatively little is known about the content of graduate students' experiences or the learning outcomes associated with these programs. The purpose of this chapter is to argue for the need to develop a scholarly research agenda focus on graduate study abroad as a field of scholarship. Our studies find that graduate students perceive, understand, and make sense of their study abroad experiences in ways that reflect their status as adult learners and practicing professionals. For this reason, there is a need to create curricular and pedagogical environments that are more closely aligned with their professional development needs. These environments should help graduate students integrate the deeply personal with the deeply professional dimensions of their study abroad experiences, thereby fostering the transformative potential inherent in such programs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this review of the literature, we argue that that relatively little is known from a scholarly perspective about graduate study abroad and, because of the nature of graduate students and their curricular foci, there is a need to attend to graduate study abroad as a distinct form of practice and research.

### **Undergraduate Study Abroad**

Undergraduate study abroad reflects a long tradition that is firmly rooted in time-honored ideas and concepts. As Lewin (2009) observed 'Historically, study abroad has been caught up in the pursuit of high culture' (p. xiv). According to Lewin (2009), for much of the last two centuries, study abroad has reflected the influence of the 'Grand Tour'. Largely young men were shipped off to European cities, characterized by well-developed cultures, to complete their classical education. The influence of this tradition is still evident in many study abroad programs today, such as spending a junior year in Florence, Italy to pursue the study of art, architecture, and literature.

At the same time, the global marketplace has increasingly influenced the definition and measurement of learning outcomes for study abroad. It is widely seen as one way of providing American students with opportunities to develop intercultural competence and thus compete in today's globalized world. This emphasis on study abroad as a form of internationalization is reflected in the Lincoln Commission's (2005) recommendation that the US send 'one million students to study abroad annually in a decade,' and President Obama's (2011) 'Strong Initiative' to send 100,000 students abroad annually to study in China.

Study abroad is characterized by first-hand experiences or learning in situ in authentic contexts (Bennett, 1993; Cushner, 2004; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Paige, 1993; Savicki, 2008). While the practiced of

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