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## The Impact of Student Abroad on Intercultural Competence as a Professional Disposition: Narrative Stories from Student Affairs Professionals

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**THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE  
AS A PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITION: NARRATIVE STORIES FROM  
STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS**

by

Dare Chronister, B.S., M.Ed.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Education

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

(August 2017)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Student affairs professionals (SAP) have been tasked to educate students and provide opportunities to develop skills to live in a culturally diverse and global society. The shortage of culturally competent SAP could hinder students' abilities to gain intercultural competence. The purpose of this narrative non-fiction study was to understand how SAP' study abroad experiences helped them to grow and develop intercultural competence. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify how intercultural competence shaped their practices and strategies to provide students with safe environments to gain knowledge and understanding about different cultures. Data collection included three levels of semi-structured interviews. Identified themes from the three stories were analyzed to draw conclusions about the impact of study abroad on intercultural competence and how it affected participants' careers. Their stories provide a voice of inspiration for students and future SAP to take advantage of the study abroad experience.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my committee members for their time and effort over the last several months. Your feedback and advice was invaluable to this experience. To my committee chair, Dr. Sampson, I cannot thank you enough for your support and encouragement over the last three years and allowing me the freedom to walk my own path. Dr. Bailey, I always look forward to your humor and candor to challenge me at every turn. Dr. Griffin, the expertise you provided about study abroad experiences were enlightening and helped me develop my dissertation further than I ever expected. Lastly, Dr. Solmonson, I appreciate the opportunity you provided for me to intern with you in the student affairs master's program. I have great respect for you as a colleague and consider you a cherished mentor.

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I would like to thank my friends and family for their patience and understanding over the last few years when I had to be absent from special events and regular

communication. Your endless support and encouragement kept me going until the end. Mum, you were my anchor during this process, always there to sooth my frustrations and comfort my tears. I am so grateful for your educational background and expertise when I needed sound advice. Finally, to Sura and Taurie, my writing companions, who stayed by my side during long homework sessions and provided entertainment and love during my much-needed breaks.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to the student affairs professionals that work daily to impact students' lives. To the professionals that work tirelessly to provide opportunities for students to grow and develop intercultural competence so they may become more understanding and open-minded people in a diversely growing world. To the professionals that had the courage to travel abroad, be vulnerable, and learn about new cultures, then come back to share their experiences with students and inspire them to take chances.

In addition, I want to dedicate this dissertation to the strong independent women in my life. I have been blessed with many inspirational mentors and without their influence and advice, I would not have become the woman I am today. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially my parents. Education was a core value growing up and they always wanted their children to earn the highest level of education because they understood the impact it would have on our future.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to those willing to challenge the process because I truly believe that without 'asking why,' the world will never evolve to support a continuously changing society. To the free spirits, that walk their own paths, leading others to new and exciting adventures. And to the people that value love above all else, the one element that crosses all countries, populations, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, ages, genders, orientations, and abilities to connects us all.



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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction to the Study**

#### **Introduction**

One of the greatest challenges facing college students today is how to live as responsible global citizens. These citizens need to be confident and skilled in making responsible choices that impact future generations (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2006). The responsibility of educating students in intercultural competence is a task for the family, schools, and the community. Students should be educated by their parents and educational professionals to respect others, despite differences in religion, race or culture, and other personal aspects. In an ideal world, students are brought up with a sympathetic understanding and broad perspectives of the world (Almond, 2010).

#### **Background of the Problem**

Over time, the role of higher education has come to include the development and preparation of college students' ability to function in a diverse world (Taylor, 1998). Theories have been created to inform assumptions about the development of college student's cognitive development as it pertains to their understanding and interpretation of the world around them, including experiences that shape student's beliefs and values (Sandoval-Lucero, 2014). Student affairs professionals are at the

forefront of providing a nurturing environment in higher education institutions that fosters intercultural competence for students to learn (Taylor, 1998).

As the number of monocultural countries decrease and work environments become more multicultural, various aspects are changing that shape national features, such as lifestyle, economic production, national mind-set, statehood traditions, and personal character traits. When different cultures collide, conflict may arise causing miscommunication and the emergence of stereotypes (Taylor, 1998). Thus, it is essential for professionals to become aware of various cultures and norms to develop intercultural competence which includes awareness, knowledge, and skills to provide formal, informal, and self-learning experiences for students. The knowledge needed pertains to cultural differences, religions, ethical attitudes, and values (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014). Studying abroad has been an effective program used in higher education to educate students by providing opportunities to experience different cultures and allow students to develop attitudes and skills that lead to gaining intercultural competence (Salisbury et al., 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of this study revolves around shortage of student affairs professionals that have studied abroad and inability to use cultural experiences as a tool to educate students about intercultural competence. It has become the responsibility of higher education institutions, especially in student affairs, to provide educational opportunities for students to learn and prepare for living in a diverse society (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014). Without the proper exposure to different cultures and the guidance



to reflect on their experiences and feelings, students may not be able to come to their full potential of understanding people different from themselves (Williams, 2005).

If students are not being encouraged more to study abroad or not provided with opportunities to experience different cultures, their development of intercultural competence may be hindered (Terzulolo, 2016). Therefore, the scarcity of culturally educated and experienced student affairs professionals, those responsible for creating and directing programs about diversity, cultural awareness, and inclusion, is another problem recognized in this study (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014). Many student affairs professionals may not have developed the skills and cultural understanding needed to gain intercultural competence, further crippling their ability to connect and educate diverse students about a variety of cultural norms, beliefs, and issues.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how student affairs professionals' personal study abroad experiences helped them grow and develop intercultural competence. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify how the student affairs professionals use intercultural competence to shape their practices and strategies to provide students in higher education an environment that fosters intercultural competence to educate students to live in a culturally diverse and global society.

### **Research Questions**

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do student affairs professionals perceive their study abroad experiences to have impacted their personal development of intercultural competence?

2. What perceptions do student affairs professionals have on how intercultural competence affects their professional disposition?
3. What strategies do student affairs professionals use to provide an environment that reflects their professional disposition?

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions directed this study:

1. Participants will provide honest information based on personal experiences.
2. Participants experiences during study abroad may be similar to the researcher's personal experiences in a study abroad program.
3. Participants will provide information and examples of practices and strategies that affect a professional disposition that includes intercultural competence.

### **Definitions**

Definitions for key terms in this qualitative study are indicated below:

**Student Affairs.** Student affairs is a division of the university that is responsible for the holistic development and engagement of students outside the academic classroom. Offices may include admissions, recruitment, and orientation working with students before they even enter college to housing, activities, conduct and including any other general service provided by the university to assist students (Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Sandeen, 2011).

**Student Affairs Professionals.** A higher educational professional who currently

works in the field of student affairs and actively engages with students in an environment created for student learning and development.

**Study Abroad.** Study abroad can be defined as international study initiatives which include travel programs and short-term summer and holiday sessions. Such programs are designed to remove students from their home campuses to experience different cultures through linguistic and academic immersion. Study abroad programs can vary based on length, housing, location, linguistic competence required, including additional factors (Engle & Engle, 2003).

**Intercultural competence.** The terminology used for intercultural competence varies across professional disciplines. In this study, intercultural competence will be the primary term used to explain interactions between people of different backgrounds (Deardorff, 2011). In addition, intercultural competence includes the knowledge and understanding of different cultures combined with the abilities, skills, and etiquette norms to act accordingly (Karnyshev, Karnysheva, & Ivanova, 2014).

**Professional Disposition.** Professional disposition is the values, beliefs, and attitudes a professional demonstrates through verbal and nonverbal behavior as they educate and interact with students and colleagues (Bercaw, Summers, Colby & Payne, 2012). Dispositions are developed through prior experiences and knowledge (Baldacchino, 2008).

### **Significance of the Research**

As globalization increases, the world becomes a more culturally diverse place leaving higher education institutions with the responsibility of educating and providing

students with opportunities to develop intercultural competence which is considered vital for living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). Student affairs professionals of today are challenged to be skilled and confident in educating students to become global citizens who make responsible decisions that positively impact future generations. Students need to be able to make decisions with intercultural understanding which allows them to find commonalities among their differences and work more effectively together. Students also need to be cognizant of the connections that support empathy, compassion, understanding, self-awareness, and tolerance to build relationships. These character traits help students listen, engage, and learn from each other (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2006).

To teach intercultural competence, the college classroom setting presents challenges to the effectiveness of truly experiencing a culture to prepare students for diverse situations. Educational practices that focus on international encounters with people from various cultures are considered valuable in developing an understanding that is often realized when immersed in the experience (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright & McMillen, 2009).

Research concerning study abroad recognizes that the factors involved are continuously changing including students, cultural environments, and educational programs and resources, thus the research will never be conclusive in determining the impact on student development. While researchers on intercultural competence have developed solid theories over decades of research, not every avenue of how intercultural competence has been explored thoroughly. For this reason, this study focused on the

research about gaining intercultural competence through study abroad and its effect on student affairs' professional dispositions. Research is also missing on the connection between professionals' ability to demonstrate intercultural competence to enhance students' learning environments.

### **Summary**

Student affairs professionals that are equipped with knowledge and first-hand experiences related to intercultural competence from participating in study abroad programs can provide insight into how to foster appropriate environments for greater student learning and development. This study examined the perspectives of student affairs professionals from different higher education institutions on how their experiences abroad affected their growth and ability to demonstrate intercultural competence as a professional disposition.

This study is organized into the following chapters: Chapter II is a review of literature describing student affairs within higher education. The term intercultural competence is explained including its impact in the student affairs followed by a history of study abroad. Lastly, professional disposition is defined and explained in relation to student affairs and higher education. Chapter III outlines the design of the study including the how and why the participants were chosen, the role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis strategies used by the researcher. Chapter IV, V, and VI presents the data gathered from interviewing the participants for the study and Chapter VII offers the conclusion, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

This study explored student affairs professionals' perceptions on the impact study abroad has on their development of intercultural competence. The study also examined how the student affairs professionals' intercultural competence affects their professional dispositions in their career. In this chapter, the following topics are discussed: history and purpose of student affairs, brief history of higher education; intercultural competence; study abroad, study abroad in higher education; professional disposition, and intercultural competence as a professional disposition.

#### **Student Affairs**

Student affairs does not have a long history; however, it is one with much significance in how higher education institutions function in the 21st century to educate students holistically (Silva, 2005). How student affairs operates, in terms of its underlying mission and purpose, highly affects how and why students are developed during their educational endeavors (Sandeem, 2011). Considering the cultural development of college students, study abroad programs can play a pivotal role in the education and expansion of intercultural competence (Covert, 2014).

**Brief history of higher education.** American higher education was conceived in the 1630s to provide an education comparable to Great Britain's Oxford and Cambridge because the founders were familiar with the educational system (Geiger, 2015; Thwing, 1906). Harvard University, the first college formally established, conveyed a liberal education in the arts because the founders believed the arts were an essential piece of the culture for the education of gentlemen (Geiger, 2015). From England, the American Puritans modeled their hierarchical society where an education and property were indicators of social status and societal expectations (Thwing, 1906). Harvard University's curriculum and environment supported this culture of status. Yale and the College of William and Mary, the next two higher education institutions established, followed Harvard's lead (Geiger, 2015).

Limited resources, lack of teachers, close oversight by the government, and small-scale operations altered the original idea for development of American higher education (Ricci, 2010). One of the most significant alterations was the evolution of a strong president governed by an outside board leaving the faculty with less power within the university unlike the British standard (Geiger, 2015; Thwing, 1906). American higher education created a collegiate way of living which included residential colleges to encourage loyalties of class cohorts. By 1775, the student population had increased to over 700, about one percent of the age range of white males were living on campus at the established colleges (Geiger, 2015).

Many students were influenced by family and individual agency on the distinctive path they followed to pursue a college degree. Career preparation was typically not

among those reasons to attend college. To be considered a gentleman, society expected young men to have a liberal education with moral and social meaning. It was not until after the revolutionary war, that colleges decided to add the Enlightenment ideal of 'useful knowledge' to the curriculum to support the foundation of a liberal education. Architecture, agriculture, navigation, and modern languages were among the new additions (Geiger, 2015).

Higher education in the early nineteenth-century saw a growth in medical, law, and theology schools. Students entered professional training at these schools after a few years of college study. Despite the progress of higher education, a small percentage of young men remained eligible to attend college because of westward exploration and feasibility. As colleges struggled to maintain enrollment numbers, admissions standards were lowered allowing a wider range of students from different backgrounds to apply for study. The diversity brought with it a more democratic spirit than before and a need to maintain control over students. A period called the Awakening followed, where religious denominations supported college education systems to guide moral efforts (Geiger, 2015).

In mid-1800s, women permanently entered higher education by way of coeducational instruction and the creation of educational institutions for women. The emergence of extracurricular activities also shaped the mid-1800s. Milestones, such as elections, rituals, and ceremonies became more elaborate. Literary societies and secular musical groups flourished, along with social fraternities. Students started spending more time being physically active which sparked the beginning of intercollegiate athletics.



Participation in extracurricular education and activities quickly swept throughout American higher education forming the college 'experience' which guided the culture of the institution (Geiger, 2015).

Higher education had a devastating few years during the Civil War where little educational progress was made because students were enlisting in the war efforts in the north and, especially, the south. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 provided a federal endowment to each state accepting the terms to fund agriculture and mechanic arts to support industrial pursuits and professions, which would relieve part of the devastation felt from the war. It took decades for these Land Grant colleges to become full universities (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Geiger, 2015). By the end of the nineteenth century colleges and universities were transforming based on the curriculum of academic disciplines, rather than the general classical instruction, and student preference. The transition was initiated by the faculty's scholarly and scientific research, producing specialized knowledge leading to a modern style of education (Geiger, 2015).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, research universities separated themselves from the standard of higher education by providing the largest operating budgets, the most resources for faculty, covering the widest range of disciplines, highest level of curriculum, and graduation research and education options. These institutions included: Columbia, Harvard, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Yale, California, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Chicago, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, MIT, and Stanford (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Geiger, 2015). State schools soon followed the trend by adding new schools, departments, and degrees, slowly growing until they could add

graduate education and research. As higher education institutions' student populations increased, external relations became more important to fund and provide resources, thus inspiring universities to embrace service to society as a core part of their institutional mission (Geiger, 2015).

As universities were growing and transforming academically, they were simultaneously changing outside the classroom producing a collegiate revolution that conveyed a new significance to the meaning of college. The most visible change was the popularity of intercollegiate football among other collegiate activities and fraternal organizations (Geiger, 2015). Administrative offices were created to provide some degree of control for the additional extracurriculars (Ricci, 2010; Geiger, 2015). With the revolution, more middle-class Americans were given an opportunity to attend college based on talent and hard work. The reward of a degree was sweetened by attaining a degree of culture and socialization, hopefully promoting their social status (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Geiger, 2015). Universities and colleges in the United States continued to grow and develop until mass higher education was the norm in America allowing students from a variety of backgrounds and socioeconomic status to further their education (Geiger, 2015).

**History of student affairs.** Between World War I and World War II, enrollment of American students in college, ages 18-22 increased to 33 percent of the population. In the 1970s that number increased to 50 percent (Thelin & Gasman, 2011). This led to the first student affairs 'officers' added by university administrators to enforce regulations because they feared the increasing number of students could cause potential student

conduct problems and there were not enough faculty to properly control the students (Thelin, 2011). In 1890, administration at Harvard University asked LeBaron Russell Briggs to serve as dean with the simple responsibility of looking out for the student's welfare. As academic responsibilities increased, faculty members no longer had time to council and advise students on their social and personal lives. With the increasing student numbers, the needs of those students also expanded and student affairs increased their services to offer recruitment, helping with financial aid, housing and feeding students, health services, and services for students with disabilities, all while still disciplining them (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

**Purpose of student affairs.** Clarifying a singular purpose or mission for student affairs is complicated because of the variety of functions encompassed within the department (Kane, 2014). In addition, the continuous changes that affect higher education affairs cause new priorities for student affairs. To combat these priorities, student affairs programs and services evolved to offer women's centers, diversity programs, research and assessment centers, computer labs, and civic education (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). While new roles and functions are being created, old titles and offices are being renamed and reorganized in order to stay up to date with current needs. Because of the regular adjustments and shifting of student affairs, defining and promoting clear role expectations and core missions that are shared by all professionals are problematic (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Kane, 2014).

Despite the trouble defining a mission that applies to all roles and functions of student affairs, professionals have little difficulty with following a core set of values and

beliefs that have reliably been used to guide them through their careers (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). These common values are based on the concerns for students' physical, social, financial, and spiritual needs in order to cultivate them through a holistic development (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Chessman, 2015)). Professionals in student affairs encourage students to take personal and social responsibility as individuals in society and support their endeavors towards advancement. The holistic development of students has been held at the heart to the field of student affairs and shaped its purpose. This purpose has served as the basis for policies involving student rights, civil rights, rights of women, multicultural diversity, civic education, and health services (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Kane 2014; Chessman, 2015).

A study at the College of the Rockies examined how student affairs professionals developed holistic support and engagement for students to succeed educationally. The study included student support and engagement strategies, holistic retention models, and leadership and organizational change. Silva (2009) used interview and learning circle research techniques with students and leaders to gather perspectives and experiences. Findings concluded that holistic development of students was significant when student affairs professionals acknowledged cultural worldviews and values, used supportive relationships to help students engage in a learning experience, and made student's education relevant to their future goals (Silva, 2009).

Student affairs professionals are leading the way by providing a supportive environment for non-traditional academic learning. Individuals that choose to work in student affairs have a commitment to the students they serve and work to gain the

knowledge and skills necessary to develop students holistically (Sandeem, 2011). Sandoval-Lucero (2014) gathered research to provide a review of multiple theories related to how diverse college students interact within their campus environment. Implications of the research suggest that professionals should provide a student-centered learning environment to enhance holistic development of all students. The research also highlights information related to the needs of college students' development. (Sandoval-Lucero, 2014). There are certain assumptions and beliefs that shape the field of student affairs, such as each person having worth and dignity, student involvement and out-of-class environments enhance student learning, and prejudice cannot be tolerated. These values define the actions of student affairs professionals (Sandeem, 2011).

Two guiding premises emerged for student affairs professionals. The first being that student affairs should intentionally provide interactive programs to enhance student development and secondly, the nature of these programs could be tied directly to student development theories. The conversation of student development and student affairs continues to today, but the agreement of the education of the whole student is still at the forefront of a college education (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

As the student affairs profession grew, the professional roles, functions, and activities of student affairs staff members divided and became more diverse as additional staff members were needed to carry out the various positions (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Sriram, 2014). Their roles can vary from counseling and advising to providing health services, managing housing operations, and planning social and service activities (Dalton & Crosby, 2011 Chessman, 2015). Other roles include, but are not limited to,

administering financial aid, admissions programs, coordinating recreation, and directing social media. While all these roles fall under the student affairs umbrella and they share common cursory connections, they often function independently in regards to administrative and programmatic efforts. Student affairs is referred to, by many colleges and universities, as the department that provides all institutional services not directly related to academic programs (Dalton & Crosby, 2011).

**Student affairs paradigms.** To further understand the complex functioning of student affairs, categorizing the various roles and using conceptual paradigms can assist to identify the meaning of work involved in student affairs. Paradigms can also serve as an outline for connections to other institutional functions in higher education institutions. The four main paradigms explained below are the more popular and widely shared among student affairs. Even though there is some overlap between the paradigms, there is significant philosophical and practical differences (Dalton & Crosby, 2011).

The student services paradigm, often considered the earliest conceptual theory used to explain student affairs role in providing for students' informal and non-academic needs and interests. Because of its use in the early development of student affairs, the focus of the paradigm is on the general welfare of the students (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). Professionals emphasized providing educational opportunities through the student's needs and interests to enhance their development as individuals. This notion of improving educational experiences outside of the classroom was the beginning of inserting the importance of the role of student affairs within higher education (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Sriram, 2014).

The student development paradigm draws from the social sciences constructing an intellectual framework for student affairs providing a justification for the multifaceted work of the profession. The conceptual model has helped unify the various functions and integrate the diverse elements of student affairs (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). In addition to reconfirming the core values that have defined the work functions, the paradigm provides a formal language and tools used to mature and direct expertise for scholars and practitioners (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Sriram, 2014). There are some critics that emerged at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century questioning the limitations of the student development paradigm. Scrutiny arose surrounding the worth and relevance of the model facing a new age of a changing higher education system with different challenges and issues (Dalton & Crosby, 2011).

The student learning paradigm evolved from the shortcomings of the student development paradigm. The goal of this conceptual model shifts to a learning focus highlighting connections to the academic mission of the university. This allowed student affairs to create a position in the educational mission of higher education promoting their significance of engaging students in learning and development. Even with the positive aspects of the student learning paradigm, recognition and cooperation with faculty remains challenging. Faculty members claim an illegitimate nature of a suitable partnership faulting inexperience and lack of knowledge for effective educational leadership (Dalton & Crosby, 2011).

An example of the student learning paradigm was found in a study conducted by Perez (2016) about the collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs as a

critical factor in student learning. The study had two primary research questions used to interview administrators focusing on organizational conditions needed to create and sustain a space to support a culture for collaboration and the role of administrators in creating the space. Perez (2016) found that engaged leadership, commitment to student success, collaborative space, and student informed support are conditions to create a culture of collaboration between academic and student affairs.

Lastly, the student success paradigm, similar to the student learning paradigm because of the attention to academic success, is a conceptual model that emphasizes the holistic student development through academic and personal achievement (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Chessman, 2015). Success is explained as academic persistence, achievement, and personal life goals and ambitions. This paradigm combines the usefulness of the full range of institutional programs and services including the collaboration across academic and other fields that impact student learning and development. A specific strength of the paradigm is the adaptability to Millennial students' personality trends and the recognition of their need for individualized services, further supporting the culture of highly coordinated and orchestrated colleges and universities. A challenge for this paradigm is creating efficient methods of accountability to document student achievement (Dalton & Crosby, 2011).

While the profession of student affairs has changed over the past 200 years and mission statements have evolved to adapt to current environments, there are certain core values that have lasted through time to support the purpose of the profession (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). Such values include the holistic development of students, enhancing the



academic mission, equality, justice, and civic responsibility (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Chessman, 2015). Dalton (2011) concludes that the lasting purpose of student affairs is to “provide services and programs that enhance the intellectual and ethical development of college students.” The intellectual and ethical aspects represent two significant domains of higher learning throughout the history of American higher education. When student affairs associate these domains in their mission it represents a combination of all the paradigms and highlights the underlining purpose for all that the profession does to produce a morally and ethically responsible individual in society (Dalton & Crosby, 2011).

### **Intercultural Competence**

In the mid1980s, the interest of employee competencies was introduced as a concept that encompasses both personal behavior and technical abilities surpassing the simple concept of skill. Competence can be defined as an area of issues or phenomena one is acquainted with well (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014; Karnyshev et al., 2014). The level of knowledge can be rated on a scale from high to non-competence. Competence is measured by the level of knowledge of an individual, but also by the ability of the person to act in a practical way based on that knowledge (Karnyshev et al., 2014). Competency includes the essential knowledge, abilities, skills, and etiquette norms. The process to obtain intercultural competence should yield benefits that include satisfying needs, fostering development, and/or being distinguished by high social importance. It is only after acquiring urgent relevance and ‘modern need’ that individuals want to understand and accept the culture and values of others (Ghosh, 2013).

To foster mutual understanding, there is a positive intercultural importance of literature, music, art, science, law, education, and sport among different cultures and how they initiate and impact events of interaction (Ghosh, 2013; Karnyshev et al., 2014).

The dimensions acquired with competence include cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development. The cognitive dimension requires a certain knowledge, the behavioral dimension includes the appropriate skills, and the emotional dimension entails well-rounded attitudes (Ghosh, 2013). Members of a group or team share a pattern of behaviors, attitudes, expectations, ideas, values, and beliefs that represent a culture. Culture affects various aspects, such as, language, norms, rituals, ceremonies, life philosophy, and feeling of belonging among a group of people. The group or team of people that represent a culture can be numerous or merely a few because positive interactions with growth potentiality can happen with anyone (Ghosh, 2013; Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014).

Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens, and Oddou (2010) performed an extensive review of global leadership, literature, and theoretical and empirical research to define intercultural competence. Their research led to the domain of intercultural competence containing three dimensions. The dimensions of self-management, relationship management, and perception management consistently emerged from the many frameworks. Self-management pertains to an individual's strength of identity and how they successfully manage their emotions. Relationship management includes how aware individuals are of others and themselves and the level of impact on their interactions. In general, it

characterizes the orientation towards the importance of relationships. Perception management is considered by how individuals cognitively approach cultural differences. The authors continued by stating that these dimensions serve as building blocks in developing global leadership capabilities, in addition to higher levels of intercultural competency transferring to job performance (Bird et al., 2010).

### **Study Abroad**

International education started as an educational effort to learn about various types of people that crafted into an effort for peace among nations. As international leagues and conferences were created to encourage cooperation, education followed by initiating academic endeavors to educate students on matters of intercultural issues, such as eliminating prejudices (Scanlon, 1960). The path of international education over the past few years is presented before transitioning to higher education's role in study abroad (Salisbury, An, & Pascarella, 2013)

**Initial years.** Dating back to the seventeenth century, John Amos Comenius, an educator, suggested a Pansophic College to study the advancement among people of various nationalities. In the following centuries, the importance of international education was focused in the direction of world peace (Scanlon, 1960). But it was not until after the Napoleonic wars that the peace congresses organized international education efforts that transformed into the modern style of study abroad (Scanlon, 1960; Hayden & Thompson, 2006).

The beginning of national mass education systems sparked in the early nineteenth century because of the advancement of national interests (Hayden & Thompson, 2006).

A pioneer of international education, Marc-Antoine Jullien, advocated for the need of an international commission on education. His commission came at a time when the Holy Alliance had been formed to end conflict in Europe. While Jullien had great hopes for his proposal to share information and build trust and understanding among nations, it failed. He shifted his energy to the formation of the French Society for the Union of Nations (Scanlon, 1960; Sylvester, 2005). This effort was also unsuccessful, but it did forge the creation of the League of Nations (Scanlon, 1960).

In the late 1800s, representatives from multiple countries attended the International Conference on Primary Instruction in Brussels. The outcome of the conference was the creation of a worldwide council of education charged with educating individuals on how to work together peacefully (Scanlon, 1960; Sylvester, 2002). The focus was on teaching concepts of world understanding and respect. The *Journal of Correspondence on the Foundation of a Permanent and International Council of Education*, published in various languages, was used as a cornerstone in supporting the agenda of international education and world peace (Scanlon, 1960).

The early 1900s witnessed great growth in efforts of building world peace through the development of The Hague Conferences, Nobel Institute, Central American Court of Justice, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the International Peace Bureau to regulate the multitude of other peace organizations that arose during that time (Scanlon, 1960; Sylvester, 2002)). Education followed the emerging international peace trends by implementing organizations, courses, and activities that educated and promoted eliminating prejudice, corresponding duties to humanity, social service, and working with

other international organizations in American and European countries (Scanlon, 1960; Hayden & Thompson, 2006).

Another educator, from the 1900s, who contributed to the cause for international understanding and made a large push for international education was Francis Kemeny. Kemeny believed international education could progress from publications from various countries, international teachers' conferences, international agreements about educational organization and structure, international statements for the rights of man, removal of hatred and encouragement of shared trust in textbooks, and a rigorous effort to end racial prejudice worldwide (Scanlon, 1960).

After World War I, three key actions, following Kemeny's beliefs happened that greatly impacted international education. The first was the revision of textbooks to remove the hatred amongst countries and people. The revision was limited to Western Europe, Canada, and the United States until after World War II, when more countries became independent and wanted to increase the awareness of cultural differences. The second was governmental cultural relations programs. This movement was one of the most influential for international education, which was contributed to the desire for countries to be known worldwide and because of the development of mass media. The third key action contributing to international education was fundamental education programs, where advanced nations helped less-developed countries with their educational efforts (Scanlon, 1960).

**Emergence of study abroad in higher education.** The twenty-first century brought about the issue of globalization in higher education. Study abroad was

associated with prestige and doubt for colleges and universities because the rest of world was starting to catch up with America's power and influence (Thelin, 2011). Post-World War II, America had excelled in expanding higher education to increase access to students and other countries started following America's model (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997; Thelin, 2011). Faculty and administrators from all over the country were invited abroad to speak about developing university systems and programs. These emerging universities reshaped the world with innovative ideas allowing American universities to expand globally by setting up distant sites in southeast Asia. European universities kept a close eye on their American counterparts and followed suit, expanding their borders (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Thelin, 2011). For the first time, the academic trade was no longer traveling in one direction, to and from America, and the world had started to create a web of networking. American universities adjusted to this new international commonwealth format and started growing their activities in other nations, creating more and more academic opportunities abroad (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997; Thelin, 2011).

The educational importance of study abroad has been researched significantly over the past decade. Global education and educating students to become global citizens is not a topic being debated as much in research or at conferences because its positive effects on student development have already been established (Lewin, 2009). As the number of students partaking in study abroad increases, higher education institutions are working to create more opportunities for students to take advantage of the study abroad experience. With additional opportunities, a more diverse student population is studying abroad. Encouragement from congress has placed more pressure on colleges and

universities to raise the number of students studying abroad to one million because the United States' national interests are at stake. The congressional committee overseeing study abroad released a statement saying, "American students need to experience living and studying overseas to be prepared to work and live in a global socio-economic and political context" (Niser, 2010).

Institutions of higher education have updated their mission statements to reflect cultural initiatives, established departments for study abroad, foreign language studies and other related programs, created international student services, and built transfer projects with international counterparts. Colleges and universities continue their support for study abroad by recognizing study abroad programs as a top priority in their strategic plan, creating campus committees that connect all the institution's international efforts, including campus administration in major decisions and funding decisions, implementing on- and off-campus programs for students to participate in, and hiring qualified faculty and staff to oversee students and find additional resources to assist study abroad (Yao, 2009).

**Development of intercultural competence.** The rise of an international higher education among students and universities was motivated by the interactions to gain intercultural competences, global awareness, and openness to differences (Lowe et al., 2014). One of the main reasons for increased support in study abroad opportunities is because of the belief of intercultural competence improvement in college students (Salisbury et al., 2013). Students who participate in study abroad have also been thought to foster positive developmental goals including marketable skills, interest in world

affairs, and enhanced critical thinking and problem solving skills more so than their counterparts who do not study abroad (Lowe et al., 2014).

A study focusing on outcome assessment by exploring intercultural communication skills of students who study abroad compared to those that remain on campus was conducted by Tracy Williams (2005). She used the skills intercultural adaptability and intercultural sensitivity to assess students' strengths and weaknesses. An implication for study abroad included that students that participated in an international education program showed a greater change in intercultural communication skills compared to their counterparts. The study used a control group which provided the researcher a base to judge the study abroad experience specially as the main contributing factor to the enhancement of communication skills. She concluded that simple exposure to other cultures was not enough, the more students interacted the more their intercultural communication skills increased favoring lengthier study abroad programs (Williams, 2005).

Another study, conducted by Terzuolo (2016), recognized the growing number of undergraduate students studying abroad and how their experience may lead to increased intercultural competence. The researcher examined study abroad students' understanding and approach to cultural differences compared to students who did not study abroad. Over 100 undergraduates from a large private university with a large percentage of study abroad students completed an Intercultural Development Inventory before and after their experience abroad. Findings showed that students, on average, became more interculturally-minded after a semester of study abroad (Terzuolo, 2016).



Covert (2014) explored students' perceptions of developing intercultural competence during study abroad programs. The researcher found that students benefited most when performing tasks in environments that challenged their cultural abilities, including intercultural encounters and reflective processes to enhance learning (Covert, 2014). Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon (2009) conducted a research project which examined the impact of study abroad programs on students' global engagement. The research revealed that study abroad positively affected civic engagement, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, voluntary simplicity, and knowledge production. The study interviewed 6391 participants that had studied abroad and all noted that study abroad was the most impactful experience of their undergraduate education that influenced their increased global engagement (Paige et al., 2009).

### **Professional Disposition**

Professional dispositions in the field of education can be ambiguous because they are based on professionals' beliefs and the relevant learning community. However, the vagueness of dispositions does not refute the possibility of providing guidelines based on individuals' internal and intangible characteristics to be used in an educational setting (Schussler & Knarr, 2013). The usage of the term disposition became popular in the 1980s as a response to the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Professional education organizations sought to establish common competencies for each level of education for professionals to use as a framework for educating students. These competencies include knowledge, performances, and dispositions. While knowledge and

performance are easily defined based on the concept of “know and be able to do,” the definition of dispositions is not as clear (Schussler, 2006).

One example of a definition for disposition, from The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, is a ‘commitment’ that all educators share (Schussler, 2006). Katz and Rath (1985) describe disposition as action in a particular context. Developing performance skills shows mastery towards a behavior, whereas, the pattern or tendency of using behavior is considered disposition. Dispositions function as a merging point between external influences of the environment, an individual’s schemata, and the point of where an educator’s thinking and actions originate, thus pushing the complexity of dispositions past the frequency of behaviors. Disposition is a combination of external and internal forces (Katz & Rath, 1985). Schussler (2006), working from Katz and Rath’s (1985) original thoughts, continued by describing where an educator’s perceptions are created is their disposition, dictating how perceptions are acted upon. An educator’s cognition, beliefs, values, culture, and prior experiences are combined to create their schemata. Since educators perceive differently, certain dispositions may be similar, but never the same (Schussler & Knarr, 2013).

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education developed a more precise definition:

The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator’s own professional growth.

Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice (Schussler, 2006. p. 53).

The power to develop dispositions lies with the ability to adjust behaviors based on what is learned from previous experiences (Baldacchino, 2008). There are three characteristics of how dispositions operate, including self-awareness, inclination, and reflection.

Educators need to develop a sense of awareness of how they think and function to understand their personal dispositions in relation to the educational setting (Schussler & Knarr, 2013).

**Council of the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.** Professionals in the field of student affairs administration in higher education have been debating over the last few decades the needed preparations for new professionals and competencies for continued professional development. Previous research has yielded significant concepts to be utilized in graduate programs, national associations, and practitioners that are seeking to further develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Herdlein, Riefler, & Mrowka, 2013). By connecting various graduate programs and professional development trainings, student affairs can create some foundation of learning across the field based on common competencies (Herdlein et al., 2013).

In 1979, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was founded with the mission to promote professional standards in student affairs, student services, and student development programs that supports quality student learning (CAS, 2015). CAS, a consortium of higher education professional associations, seeks to foster and enhance the learning, development, and achievement and promote good

citizenship of students. CAS regularly publishes a set of professional standards and guidelines, also referred to as common competencies, which are used by student affairs to create, deliver, and assess programs and services (CAS, 2015). The CAS standards are used as a tool to measure or model current efforts to represent the knowledge and experience of higher educational professionals on subject matter and student needs used in 43 functional areas to establish accountability, enhance credibility, and expand methods for successful initiatives and action plans (CAS, 2015).

**General standards.** Several researchers have provided input on what skills and competencies are required to be a successful student affairs professional. Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet (2005) support human and interpersonal relations, multicultural competency, analytical reasoning, and collaboration. Other popular skills included: program development, oral and written communication, planning and implementation, problem solving, crisis management, and conflict management. In addition, caring and empathy, consultation abilities, effective listening, leadership, and supervision were among the before mentioned (Burkard et al., 2005; Waple, 2006).

CAS General Standards' board of directors recognize there are differences across various functional areas of the higher education institution. Those functional areas include: mission; program; organization and leadership; human resources; ethics; law, policy, and governance; diversity, equity, and access; internal and external relationships; financial resources; technology; facilities and equipment; and assessment. Each functional area standard offers criteria used to self-assess quality and effectiveness of educational programs and events. The criteria focuses on student learning and

development outcomes within individual standards, called domains. Domains comprise of cognitive complexity, intrapersonal development, interpersonal competence, practical competence, civic engagement, and knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application. Furthermore, domains are specifically clarified by learning outcomes called dimensions (CAS, 2015).

**Diversity, equity, and access general standard.** Institutions in higher education must create and maintain programs and services that provide educational environments that are welcoming, accessible, inclusive, equitable, and free from harassment. The programs and services or information about them should also be present in the college or university's mission and follow all policies, codes, and laws. As dictated by the CAS General Standard, programs and services in the functional area:

- Advocate for sensitivity to multicultural and social justice concerns by the institution and its personnel
- Ensure physical, program, and resource access for all constituents
- Modify or remove policies, practices, systems, technologies, facilities, and structures that create barriers or produce inequities
- Ensure that when facilities and structures cannot be modified, they do not impede access to programs, services, and resources
- Establish goals for diversity, equity, and access
- Foster communication and practices that enhance understanding of identity, culture, self-expression, and heritage

- Promote respect for commonalities and difference among people within their historical and cultural contexts
- Address the characteristics and needs of diverse constituents when establishing and implementing culturally relevant and inclusive programs, services, policies, procedures, and practices
- Provide personnel with diversity, equity, and access training and hold personnel accountable for applying the training to their work
- Respond to the needs of all constituents served when establishing hours of operation and development methods of delivering programs, services, and resources
- Recognize the needs of distance and online learning students by directly providing or assisting them to gain access to comparable services and resources (CAS, 2015).

### **Intercultural Competence as a Professional Disposition**

When intercultural competence is present in the workplace as a professional disposition, applications such as the creation of a multicultural office nature, representations of the community and culture, and the influence on diversity have a direct impact on group behaviors and communication, teamwork, and group performance. To produce an atmosphere that promotes intercultural competence, intercultural trainings, courses, guidelines, and cross-cultural experiences including those with challenges and adjustments are used to educate and inform professionals (Ghosh, 2013).

Intercultural competence and related skills are an increasing priority in the workplace because of the changing environment. The effective cooperation, communication, and understanding among people of different races, cultures, and orientation is paramount in the success of a workplace. Individuals must demonstrate the ability to learn, be flexible, tolerant, and focused on self-improvement to establish the foundation of gaining intercultural competence. Considering the effects of globalization, the professional staff members' capacity for intercultural competence allows more flexibility to work in a multicultural society (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014).

To create an inclusive space for culturally diverse individuals, diversity scholars emphasize building competencies in its organizational members. There are two types of competencies needed at the interpersonal level. The first competency type is 'interacting with difference' which measures someone's ability to actively listen to others without being judgmental, flexible and adaptive workstyle, treat others with respect, and willingness to accommodate the needs of others. The second competency type is 'valuing differences' (Ghosh, 2013). This competency measures using diversity as an asset to benefit the organization and its members, innovative and creativity in the workplace, support the systems and practices that embrace diversity in the workplace, and taking advantage of what differences can add (Ghosh, 2013; Haapanen, 2015).

Intercultural competence can be acquired by passing through multiple stages. These consist of the process of an individual change and growth from ethnocentrism through awareness and understanding, acceptance and respects, and appreciation and valuing. Natural situations where people that have never encountered other cultures and

do not have knowledge of intercultural differences and evaluate the world by their own standards are viewed as ethnocentrism. People who protect their own standards and values from the cultural identities of other cultures are considered to have an ethnocentric position. The next stage is awareness and understanding, where intercultural differences are acknowledged, comprehension of differences impact relationships, and mindfulness of how stereotypes and preconceptions affect relationships between different cultures (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014).

The stage of acceptance and respect is reached when individuals accept different cultures and praise others when they know their norms and values oppose their own culture. As a person starts to understand cultural diversity, grow and develop, and take advantage of the opportunities, they are experiencing the stage of appreciation and valuing. The individual obtains new skills and attitudes that are not characteristic of their own culture. The last stage of intercultural competency is when individuals can function within their own cultural identity while accepting aspects of other cultures by allowing them to respond appropriately to intercultural problems and find competent solutions (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014).

Intercultural competence should be maintained because it is not a singular point of realization, but requires constant evolution and development. To continually develop intercultural competence, individuals need to focus on improving their ability to learn. Opportunities for individuals to develop their competence further come from contacting people from different cultures and creating a stream of regular communication. Since cultures are in an endless evolution of change and contact among different cultures reveal



new challenges and the necessity to understand current environments, reaching intercultural competence is not terminal (Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014).

Preconceptions or unsupported prejudices created from the environment surrounding the individual can be the main hindrance to the development of intercultural competence. Preconceptions and prejudices can be defined as sense of dislike or hatred or irrational feelings based on experiences from other people and can usually be determined by the lack of knowledge about a subject. Individuals who have a negative experience interacting with someone from another culture are more likely to project their feelings from that negative experience to others from that same culture. Therefore, it is critical for individuals to gain knowledge through formal and informal experiences to build positive attitudes and develop the necessary skills to broaden their point of view to enhance the understanding of intercultural differences in the workplace (Grazulis, & Markuckiene, 2014).

Salisbury et al. (2013) conducted a study to assess related studies on the impact of the study abroad experiences on intercultural competence using a longitudinal pretest-posttest design. A theoretically grounded model of college impact utilized such variables as precollege characteristics, institutional characteristics, and college experience. The study supported that study abroad participation leads to greater intercultural competence, as well as, an increased amount of diverse contact. This study also revealed that professionals at higher education institutions who reflect intercultural competence are able to provide meaningful experiences for student to develop intercultural competence through integrative learning programs that offer diverse interactions. Implications of the

study suggested, student affairs professionals should continue to combine reflection and programming that allows students to make meaning of their diverse experiences to apply to their personal development and future goals (Salisbury et al., 2013).

Henderson-King (2000) gathered research supporting a link between a liberal arts education and increases in student development connected to humanitarianism, greater regard for civil rights, and high levels of tolerance related to social, racial, and ethnic diversity. Understanding the development of intercultural competence can be viewed from an interactionist theory as students' experience ongoing exchanges between themselves and those different from them. College provides an environment for students to explore their possible selves in order to later define themselves leading to a greater understanding of the differences that exist (Taylor, 1998). Therefore, to provide students the best environment to learn and develop, student affairs professionals' previous experiences with culturally diverse individuals has significant influencers in the process of learning intercultural competence and tolerance. Cultural encounters, even small ones, can assist in developing broader perspectives and more cooperative behaviors (Ghosh, 2013).

### **Summary**

International education stemmed from initiatives to promote world peace and understanding through cultural education and awareness. Higher education is an effective venue in providing education and growth for intercultural awareness in an increasingly global society. Study abroad programs have been significant in providing students the opportunity to immerse in various cultures to develop intercultural

competence. Student affairs professionals have the responsibility to cultivate students' holistic growth and development. Professional dispositions that include intercultural competence can enhance environments that foster student learning and development. Chapter II presented information on the history and role of student affairs and higher education. Intercultural competence is defined and explained in relation to student affairs followed by an explanation of study abroad in higher education. Lastly, professional disposition is described including how intercultural competence associates as a professional disposition.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This study was designed to use a narrative nonfiction method to examine student affairs professionals' personal study abroad experiences and on their perceptions of impact on intercultural competence demonstrated as professional dispositions.

#### **Overview**

Study abroad, as a form of international education efforts, maintains the mission of learning about various types of people and the peace among different groups (Scanlon, 1960). Student affairs professionals have been tasked with educating college students to become global citizens in an increasingly diverse society (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2006). Student affairs professionals' exhibit intercultural competence in their workplace by providing environments that promote cultural awareness and education. This study explored student affairs professionals' study abroad experiences and their perceptions of personal development of intercultural competence as a significant factor of its presence in their student affairs workplace.

## Research Design

The term narrative has multiple definitions in qualitative research. Narrative can stand for any prosaic discourse, a category of research data, natural speech, or a linguistic interpretation of qualitative research projects. Polkinghorne (1995) provided qualitative researchers used “narrative to describe the form of the collected body of data they have gathered for analysis” (p. 6). The analysis of narrative text added more direct access to common themes for research studies. This standard among researchers evolved the term narrative to refer more to stories, as lived and expressed experiences, in qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Narrative research was used in a variety of forms, analytic practices and is most often found in the social and humanities disciplines (Conle, 2000; Creswell, 2013). “Narrative” referred to a specific text or within the context of inquiry for qualitative research as an individual’s story. A narrative can be the method of study, such as the procedures of analyzing stories told, and the phenomenon of study, such as a narrative of illness (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2013).

When performing narrative research, Clandinin, and Huber (2002) supported using a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space based on Dewey’s concept of experience. The three-dimensional space included temporality, which may look like the past, present, and future, personal and social interaction, and the place or situation of the story. The temporality dimension was the moving backward and forward (Clandinin, & Huber, 2002; Reed 2006). The temporal dimension of this study reflected the student affairs professionals’ past study abroad experiences, present work environment, and

future applications of, both, the knowledge from studying abroad and working in the field of student affairs (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). The participant's personal and social interactions and location of the stories included those with other cultures in the different countries during their study abroad experiences and from their past and present higher education institutions (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Young & Joe, 2012). The personal and social dimension focused inward on the individual exposing their feelings, hopes, reactions, moral standards, and other internally related characteristics. The dimension also focused outward to existential conditions (Clandinin, & Huber, 2002; Murray, 2009).

The communication during the interviewing process and informal interactions between the researcher and the participants, as well as, observations and artifacts from the student affairs professionals provided insight into the participant's personal and social perspectives (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Young & Joe, 2012). The last dimension, referring to the place, was the boundaries of inquiry landscape. The three-dimensional space was used to capture and represent the entirety of the researcher and participants lives as associated with the research study (Clandinin, & Huber, 2002). The goal was not to break down or analyze lives into various pieces, but rather to understand the complexity and fullness of them considering all the dimensions, in addition, to having a greater sense of the holistic story (Clandinin, & Huber, 2002; Murray, 2009).

### **Research Questions**

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do student affairs' professionals perceive their study abroad experiences to have impacted their personal development of intercultural competence?

2. What perceptions do student affairs professionals have on how intercultural competence affects their workplace?
3. What strategies do student affairs professionals use to provide an environment that reflects their professional disposition?

### **Participants and Setting**

When using narrative as a method, similar to this study, the narrative expresses lived and told experiences from individuals' stories that are part of the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007). During this study, I shared stories from three student affairs professionals' experiences about what they learned while studying abroad and how it has affected their workplace (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Before confirming their participation in the study, I sent the prospective participants a letter briefly explaining the study (See Appendix C). The three participants for this study were student affairs professionals, from three different universities, who have personally experienced study abroad opportunities as an undergraduate or graduate student. The participants were selected through personal connections between colleagues in the student affairs and higher education profession and for holding positions in student affairs at four-year higher education institutions who actively engage with college students. They also have more than five years of experience working in higher education and have previously studied within higher education or related programs at a masters and/or doctoral level. If one of the participants cannot commit to the study, a backup list was created of student affairs professionals with similar qualities.

**Criteria for participant selection.** Criteria for the selection of participants for this study included the following factors.

1. Participants were student affairs professionals that have worked at a higher education institution for no less than five years.
2. Student affairs professionals' workplaces reflected an environment that frequently engaged students.

### **Role of the Researcher**

**Conducting narrative research.** Narrative research does not follow a step by step procedure, but instead offers a flexible outline on collection of topics (Creswell, 2007). Three participants who have personally studied abroad and currently work in the student affairs profession were selected for this study. Before the interviews commenced, it was my responsibility to gain IRB approval from the higher education institutions of the participants involved in the study prior to initial contact (See Appendix A).

Considerable time was spent with the participants to gather their stories using multiple methods (Creswell, 2007). The story could be directly told by the participant or co-constructed between the participants and the researcher and needs to convey some message or lesson (Conle, 2000; Creswell, 2013). This study used gathered information from the participants' stories from the initial and secondary interviews, informal interactions on the participants' campuses, and observations made throughout the visit to the student affairs professionals' college or university. My role as a researcher was to collect the various types of data by interviewing the participants, recording interviews, and then transcribing their interviews. Through the transcription process of the



participants' interviews, I identified common themes and noted differences to outline meaning from their stories. In a specific study, a narrative may be a spoken or written account of a lived experience or a series of events that create an experience, usually chronologically ordered (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

I made observations concerning the interactions between myself and participants. Observations made between the participants and their environment was also noteworthy to add context to the responses from the interview for the restorying process (Creswell, 2007). Restorying includes chronologically reordering the data to produce a timeline to create a fluid story of the participants' experiences. As the participants communicated through their personality, expressions, and feelings, including how they interacted in their work environment, I noted that information as well (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2012). The primary methods for collecting data were interviews and observations. Next, I collected the context for stories gathered.

Journals or diaries, observations, field notes, letters, stories from others, documents, photos, and other types of artifacts were used, if available, as sources for the data collection that portrayed the individuals' life stories (Conle, 2001; Creswell, 2007). Participants were encouraged to share any artifacts they found relevant to express their experiences while studying abroad and exhibited their workplace culture. The context created more in-depth and personal stories by yielding more of the individuals' personal experiences, culture, and history (Creswell, 2007).

The next and very large task was restorying the individuals' experiences into stories. By restorying the collected data, I created a general framework that highlighted

the key elements of the story and reorganized into a chronological sequence (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2012). The order was needed because individuals do not often tell their stories in sequence. My role as a researcher was to provide connections between experiences and link ideas to create the restorying. Similar to works of literature, the chronology of narrative research developed a beginning, middle, and end with other aspects that relate to a predicament, conflict or struggle, and a protagonist that were involved in a plot that was somehow resolved. The chronology also followed the past, present, and future ideas of a story (Creswell, 2007).

The stories in this study presented a time, place, and scene which was included in the plot to provide substance to the individual's experience. My role also included recognizing themes within the story to add depth to the understanding and meaning (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, descriptions of the story and the themes outlined were included in the qualitative data analysis. One more element added to the analysis was the deconstruction of the stories exposing dichotomies, attending disruptions, and examining silences (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2012).

Lastly, narrative research was meant to be personal. A relationship developed between the researcher and the participants sharing their stories where both learned and grew through the process (Creswell, 2007; Conle, 2000). This relationship was only possible when the researcher actively involved the participants in the research. During the process, I negotiated the meaning of the experiences being shared through back-and-forth communication between the participants and myself, which added validity through analysis. The analyses had the potential to lend the researcher insights into her own

experiences. Overall, the researcher's main role was to retell the story that included the personal, social, and historical context of the participants while identifying themes through their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2012).

**Role of Interviewer.** Using narrative research, I selected three individuals that had a story to tell. As a researcher, it was required to make a case for why those persons' stories are worth telling. This was done through collected information from the participants, most often in the form of conversation and observation which was conducted in an interview (Creswell 2013; Tracy & Ebrary, 2013). Before starting the interview process, the participants were sent an informed consent form (See Appendix B). For this study, an initial interview was conducted which incorporated a conversational atmosphere to promote authentic and open expression (Conle, 2000; Creswell, 2013). An important role of the researcher during the interview process was to ask questions of the participants, if needed, to create a more informed and detailed narrative (See Appendix D). Questions were asked related to the understanding of a specific segment of their experience, clarifying aspects for the researcher's insight, and to expand or diminish story lines that may lead in the wrong direction or do not reflect the meaning of the story (Conle, 2001; Tracy & Ebrary, 2013). Only through discussion between the researcher and the participants could the story be completely produced as a narrative work of research. The stories also reflected the participants' identities and shed light into how they viewed the world and themselves (Conle, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

## **Data Collection**

The data collection process was detailed involving multiple considerations to gather information to answer the research questions presented in the study. Creswell (2013) suggested seven data collection activities for researchers to engage in to collect data. They were locating a site and individual/s, gaining access and making rapport, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data. While the most common activity to start with was selecting a site and individual, researchers may choose to start their process with a different activity (Creswell 2013).

Interview data were collected at a location chosen by individuals on or near their campus where they were comfortable. Participants were encouraged to share personal artifacts, such as notes, journals, and photographs, from study abroad and how their experiences have shaped their workplace to enhance the meaning and understanding of their story. In addition, the individuals provided campus tours and shadowing opportunities for myself, as the researcher, to gain greater insight into the atmosphere and culture of the participants' workplaces. Follow up interviews were conducted through Skype or Facetime applications. Interviews were transcribed and provided to the participants for review and content correction. All materials are kept in a locked file cabinet at my home and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

It is vital for researchers to find participants that were accessible and willing to contribute reliable information related to the study (Creswell, 2013). Participants for this study were chosen based on their identity in relation to the study. The student affairs

professionals were in the position to provide first-hand knowledge of their own study abroad experiences and how those experiences impacted their personal practice of intercultural competence in their careers.

The researcher was required to gain access to certain sites and individuals to provide them the ability to collect data. Approval was needed from a human subjects review board to be reviewed by a campus committee from each institution for potential risk of participants. A detailed proposal of the study offering some standard of procedures was submitted with information about how the human subjects were protected. The information included the following elements: rights of voluntary withdraw; purpose and procedures of the student; protection of confidentiality; known risks; expected benefits; and signatures of the participant and researcher (See Appendix A). For narrative research, specifically, permission was needed from the participants to share their stories for the research study (See Appendix B). I explained the purpose of the study and motivation for selecting the participants. By discussing these aspects, the researcher and the participant will build a rapport (Creswell, 2013).

Purposeful sampling, used in qualitative research, was an approach used by narrative researchers to decide on the participants for their study, how many participants, and the specific strategy used to select the sample. As the researcher, I spent considerable time reflecting on who to select and how many participants to include in the study. I highly considered how each participant would inform an understanding of the study's problem and main phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Tracy & Ebrary, 2013). The participants for this study were chosen because of their study abroad experiences and

development of intercultural competence. Because of their work in student affairs, they had the opportunity to facilitate culturally aware and inclusive environments for student learning.

The participants for this study differed based on geographical location of employment, size and type of university, position within university, and age. These differences provided varying viewpoints and perceptions of all factors involved in the study. When selecting a sampling size in narrative research, a general guideline was to select a few people to study intensely. For narrative research, one to three participants were standard, but some studies have had up to ten participants (Creswell, 2013; Tracy & Ebrary, 2013). This study had three participants to enable the researcher to spend adequate time with each professional, gathering more detailed information and build rapport to create a more authentic story.

The data collected during the study were divided into four larger categories: (1) observations, (2) interviews, (3) documents, and (4) audiovisual materials. Researchers are encouraged to use multiple methods to add substance to their study (Creswell, 2013). Interviewing and observations were the primary methods used in this study and are the most widely used methods of data collection in qualitative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Interviewing included open-ended questions, recording with an audiotape, and interview transcription. Observations consisted of gathering field notes on the participants and as an observer evaluating the study as an outsider and as an insider (Creswell, 2013). Observations of campus and office structures, atmospheres, and

personal interactions were recorded in a field journal and aided in understanding and visualizing the content from the interviews.

**Interview procedure.** Creswell (2013) presented his steps of interviewing starting with selecting research questions, which were general, open-ended, and focused on the problem associated with the study. This study focused on the inquiry of what impact study abroad experiences have on student affairs professionals' ability to demonstrate intercultural competence in the workplace. The study also sought to understand how the professionals foster environments for student learning that support cultural awareness and inclusiveness. The research questions helped develop three levels of interview questions, written for easy comprehension and to help produce a story from the participants (Creswell, 2013) (See Appendix D).

Deciding what type of interview to conduct that was practical and most likely to obtain information to answer the questions sufficiently was the next step in the process. Interviewing could be conducted several ways, each with their own advantages and disadvantages (Creswell, 2013). For this study, one-on-one interviewing allowed participants to speak honestly and share their feelings freely in a predetermined safe space for this type of interaction to take place. The more open the participants were about their life experiences the more useful the data collected was (Conle, 2001; Creswell, 2013; Tracy & Ebrary, 2013). To assist the researcher during the interview, appropriate recording procedures and devices were determined (Creswell, 2013). This study used a Sony ICD-Px440 Stereo IC Digital Voice Recorder with a built-in 4GB and

direct USB to record interviews. An Apple iPhone 6 standard recording system was used as a back-up recording device.

The interview protocol also included reminders throughout the process to encourage certain responses at certain times, for instance, a reminder to thank the participant at the end and ask for information to follow up with the participant. Lastly, I used good interview procedures during the process, not straying too far from the research questions, using the time specified, being respectful and polite, and offering few questions or advice because the job of the interviewer is to listen and observe rather than interject with personal thoughts (Creswell, 2013).

**Observation.** During the interviews and any other interactions with the participants, I used my five senses while observing to note a phenomenon in the field. Observations were noted in a field journal to add to the context of the participant's interview. Because not all observations could be recorded accurately, researchers were encouraged to focus their observations based on their research problem and questions (Creswell, 2013). There were four different types of observation: (1) complete participant, where the researcher was fully engaged; (2) participant as observer, when the researcher was more active than the participant to gain insight and subjective data; (3) nonparticipant/observer as participant, where the researcher was not included with the study participants and observed them from a distance; and (4) complete observer, when the researcher was never seen or noticed by participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). As a researcher, the ability to shift from one type of observation to another as needed throughout the study provided a more thorough understanding of the participants and the



story they were sharing. In this study, a combination of observation type 1 and 2 were utilized.

**Journaling.** I gathered spoken information about the student affairs professionals' experiences through interviews and any other artifacts, such as journals, that they wanted to share (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007). A journal is a combination between a diary, a private record of feelings, and a log, an objective report of definite events, which combines personal reflections, event details, and experience descriptions. During this research study, journaling was utilized in two ways. The first way was to learn from and understand experiences through documentation and reflection that could then be used as a story telling method. Documentation happened sporadically throughout contact with the participants based on anything found relevant to the development of the study. As the researcher, I took time to reflect during down time in between interviews, time spent on campus, and informal conversations with the participants. The second use for journaling was as a data collection method to record information to analyze later. A portion of my journal was dedicated to notes taken during planned interactions such as formal interviews and campus tours. In addition, journaling was used to enhance information recorded from interviews (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012). The various types of journaling assisted in outlining the information during the data collection process and providing insight into the underlying meaning of the story being created.

### **Validity**

The validation process had one purpose, to convince readers that the claim was strong enough to provide understanding of human action. Claims about the meaning of individual's life events were issued through narrative research to comprehend how people understand situations, others, and themselves. The goal, as a narrative researcher, was to share with readers what they have learned about human conditions from their inquiries (Polkinghorne, 1995; Hatch, 2002). To be taken seriously by readers, the knowledge claims formed to offer appropriate justification. The evidence and argument were presented clearly enough for readers to make their own judgement on the validity of the claim. The evidence and argument presented were also carefully considered to yield a justification that readers would accept as plausible for their claims. This included the responses to questions readers may have about the claims (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Narrative research was used to gather evidence to create a knowledge claim. In the presentation of research, the claim was organized and interpreted in a way to convince readers of the validity. Narrative research offered certain guidelines, the first being that there was no predetermined structure for the persuasive arguments (Polkinghorne, 1995). The progression of evidence was presented as information from collected text, explanations about why certain explanations were insufficient, and interpretations of the restoried text added to the knowledge claims being presented by the researcher (Polkinghorne, 1995; Hatch, 2002). An example was when the researcher described the context in which the words and phrases were made to create the story, thus adding greater meaning. The researcher also added to the meaning by providing details

from their own experiences that would enhance the interaction with the text for the reader (Polkinghorne, 1995; Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis incorporates collecting and organizing data, coding the data based on themes, and finally discussion representing the results. Data analysis was custom developed by the researcher, who generally, learned by doing and evolved in the field. Qualitative research during the analytic stage was intuitive, soft, and relativistic (Creswell, 2013). The researcher encountered multiple facets during the analysis procedures, such as, data managing, reading, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing, and visualizing to create an account of the story (Creswell, 2013).

In addition to interviewing the student affairs professionals, information from informal conversations and artifacts were used to further craft the meaning of the story (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the collected data were analyzed to tell a story, one that chronologically unfolds (Creswell, 2013). After the transcription process, I reordered any spoken information in chronological order (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Analyzing efforts by the researcher yielded themes from what the participant said, how the participant told the story, and who the story was intended to be heard by. Narratives were placed in a setting identified by the researcher to bring more context to the story (Creswell, 2013). After the initial interview, follow-up interview, and informal information was gathered, I reordered everything chronologically that created a clearer timeline from the student affairs professionals' study abroad involvement and their

perceptions of the effects it had on their workplace environment. NVivo 11, a coding software program, was used on the interview transcriptions to identify exact words and phrases used by the participants and researcher. From the information, the researcher recognized recurring themes to base their analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Polkinghorne (1995) used paradigm thinking and reasoning to collect data from events to create a story, develop descriptions of themes from those stories and further interpret those experiences, often referred to as “analysis of narratives.” Analytic strategies were also used based on the interactions between researchers and participants and the interpretations they shared to develop the story. By combining these two approaches, the story was more insightful (Creswell, 2013). I analyzed the participants’ stories from the events they experienced to identify common themes and differences. I used the interactions that expressed personalities and feelings to add context to their stories and further explore the meaning of their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007). This study focused on three student affairs professionals to gather more in-depth information from their study abroad and work experiences for data analysis.

**Researcher Bias.** Biases found in one-on-one interviews has been a topic of discussion and research since the 1950s. Researchers may take on different roles depending on the characteristics of their bias. One such bias is when researchers’ characteristics may inadvertently affect the recording, evaluation, interpretation, or design of the participants’ responses (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). For example, as the researcher and an undergraduate student that previously studied abroad, I have bias based

on my personal study abroad experience, the growth and development that I sustained, and the possible utilization of my experiences as a student affairs professional.

When researchers present personal bias, the effects can cause unbalance and limit endeavors or it can motivate and illuminate inquiry. Despite efforts to eliminate bias, it is not possible with social research (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Mason (2002) suggests, “if interviews are always social interaction, however structured or unstructured the researcher tries to make them, it is inappropriate to see social interaction as “bias” which can potentially be eradicated.” He continues to explain by recognizing the context and situation of the interview and data collected, the role of bias can be better understood (Mason, 2002). As a student affairs professional, I believe that study abroad was a positive influence on my personal development of intercultural competence. I have also found that the communication skills that I gained from my experience assist in my efforts to interact with students from various backgrounds. Because of my bias, I strived to limit the amount of responses to the participants during the interviews, allowing them to expand on their own perspectives.

### **Provisions for Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research developed trustworthiness through five criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. The truth behind the participant views and how their views were presented by the researcher referring to the credibility of the study (Cope, 2014). When I described my own experiences as the researcher and used the information from the participants to verify their findings, the credibility of the study was enhanced. For qualitative studies, when individuals would

immediately identify with the human experience described, the study was considered credible (Cope, 2014). In this study, I demonstrated methods of observation, participant engagement, and steps of information clarification to support credibility.

Dependability, the constancy of data over comparable situations, was considered present in a researcher's process when the study procedures and findings were repeated with similar participants and similar conditions (Cope, 2014; Williams, 2005). In this study, the comparable situations were the student affairs professionals that worked at higher education institutions that previously studied abroad. The interviews were conducted in similar manners based on the professionals' comfortability which followed the same processes. Confirmability was demonstrated by the ability of the researcher to present the participant's responses without biases or including their own viewpoints (Cope, 2014). I created a foundation for confirmability by describing how conclusions were reached, interpretations recognized, and showed that the data presented came directly from the findings. Providing meaningful quotes from the participants related to underlying themes was used as a strong indicator for conformability (Cope, 2014).

Transferability was considered the application of the findings to other settings and groups. For studies that have mastered transferability, the results have meaning for various individuals and readers who would relate through personal experiences (Cope, 2014). In this study, it was my responsibility to provide sufficient information and insight into the findings for transferability. Authenticity referred to the researcher's ability and to what extent they could express accurate feelings and emotions of the experiences provided by participants (Cope, 2014). The better I presented authentic

information, the more likely the reader was to grasp the true meaning of the experiences. Rich quotes from the participants were the best way to convey such authenticity (Cope 2014; Williams, 2005).

When working to enhance trustworthiness, researchers try to use the set of criteria in each phase of the study. Triangulation was a method used by this researcher involving multiple methods of data collection to create a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied (Cope, 2014; Williams, 2005). This study used interviews, observations, and field journaling recorded throughout the data collection process. For qualitative research, the thoroughness of the data collected was paramount to the effectiveness of study.

Journaling is identified as a useful tool to collect data through documenting specific experiences and feelings associated with the researcher and study participants. As a method of data collection, journaling has long been accepted as a valid way to access rich qualitative data (Cope, 2014). Journals are reflexive meaning the researcher was self-aware and able to identify between what comes from the participant and what comes from the researcher (Williams, 2005). As I journaled, I reflected on my own experiences separating the information from the participants' stories from their interviews.

Member checking was another method used for trustworthiness in qualitative research (Williams, 2005). I used this method to honor the meaning of the participant's experiences. To establish trustworthiness and further establish the relationship with the participant, I checked information accuracy and asked for feedback from the participants

at multiple times during the research process. Researchers strived to find the balance between the participant's subjective point of view and the researcher's reflexive interpretation of the meaning (Williams, 2005).

If researchers were not clearly communicating their findings, then their level of trustworthiness significantly declines. Findings addressed the following components: (1) encourage further dialogue; (2) reveal limitations; (3) improve processes for individuals; and (4) contribute to social justice and change (Williams, 2005). The combination of these findings was often referred to as 'social validity.' Social validity evaluated the importance and value of an intervention by assessing goals, procedures, and outcomes of the study (Williams, 2005). When relating the findings to research and literature and citing current theories and practices, allowed researchers to acknowledge and better interpret information for the reader. In addition to discussing relevant studies, noting comparisons and contrasts within the study provided another dimension of communicating findings (Williams, 2005).

### **Summary**

This study used a qualitative methodology incorporating the role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis to present and examine the impact of student affairs professionals' perspectives of their study abroad experience. The narrative nonfiction method was utilized because it provided a reflection of more authentic attitudes, feelings, emotions, and experiences of the participants' involvement in a study abroad program, growth they sustained afterwards, and applicability of knowledge in their workplace. Restorying the interviews of the participants and identifying underlying



themes and patterns produced information on the impact of study abroad programs on their personal development and implementation of intercultural competence as a professional disposition.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Ellen**

#### **Introduction**

Ellen is a white female in her early 30's from southern Louisiana. She is of average height, slim, with long auburn hair. Her accent reflected the region where she lived. She had a calm and welcoming demeanor that complimented her generally joyful spirit. Ellen recently received her doctorate in education while working as the director of student involvement and leadership at a four-year comprehensive, medium sized, urban research university in the southern United States.

During college as an undergraduate student, Ellen studied abroad in Guadalajara, Mexico and in Madrid, Spain. She was an active student on campus and performed well in the classroom. After graduation, Ellen earned a master's degree in higher education at a large Midwestern university before moving back to Louisiana. She has worked in student affairs since, in addition to actively holding positions in multiple student affairs national organizations.

I met Ellen at a national leadership institute hosted by the National Association for Campus Activities in 2012. We both worked on staff for the institute along with six other professionals from various universities around the United States. As student affairs

professionals, we instantly connected sharing our experiences, struggles, and successes with our careers. We continued to work the same leadership institute for the next three years, continuing to build our professional and personal relationship. Of the three participants, I know Ellen the best because of our universities were in the same national region within the National Association of Campus Activities.

### **Study Abroad Experiences**

For study abroad experiences, Ellen was fortunate enough to have studied in Mexico and Spain. Her first trip was to Guadalajara, Mexico, for six weeks during the summer of her Freshman year of college. She took an introduction to Spanish class and lived with a family. One of her sorority sisters also attended class and lived with the family.

We walked to class four days a week and that is all we did. There was only four other people in our class. So, while it was study abroad, it still very much in a bubble. The host family was ridiculously nice and their home was beautiful. I loved being able to see how they lived from day to day, eat what they ate, and meet their family and friends. For me, the experience was an easy transition. Since, I was only going to Mexico, I was able to get my feet wet by not going anywhere extreme. It was a good first step and very, very doable.

Ellen reflected on her encounters with the locals explaining that not every interaction was positive. Many locals judged her simply by her looks assuming she fit the stereotype they had of all Americans. This made her realize that the world is much

larger than America and not everyone has the same respect Americans have for themselves.

I remember we went out one night to a high-end club. I'm from New Orleans, so going out is not a big deal. Some of the locals were calling us gringos and I had no idea what that meant. One of my Mexican friends, that I had made while I was there, explained that gringos was an insult meant for spoiled Americans, specifically white people. I felt so naïve, not everyone liked Americans. I was shocked, but not scared. I wanted to prove to them that I was cool, not the typical American they thought of when they called me a gringo.

This incident was one of the earliest and largest that really challenged Ellen's point of view making her realize that because she looked, sounded, and acted different, everyone around her was going to be paying attention. It was at that moment, she started to understand how significant her abroad could be.

It definitely made me more aware of my actions. I wanted to be courteous, open, try new things and learn about the culture, and gain cultural confidence. I realized that in the past, they must have had a bad experience with an American so I had better bring my A-game to try and break the stereotypes they had for Americans.

Ellen found it very hurtful to have poor judgement passed on her. Ellen knew that she did not fit the stereotype the locals had of her and wanted nothing more than to learn and be accepted by this new culture she was living in. She took various steps to acclimate to the Mexican culture, especially during her daily interactions.

At first, I was scared. I do not know why I was scared. I guess I was nervous about insulting someone. I tried to speak the language to better learn the culture. As long as I tried, people were pretty open and receptive.

Ellen's first study abroad experience really opened her eyes and broadened her view of a culture outside of her own. She also experienced what it felt like to be a minority. Her first steps towards true independence were taken giving her a new sense of confidence. Ellen's second study abroad experience was in Madrid, Spain during the spring semester of her sophomore year in college. She lived with three other girls and a senorita.

That semester, the decision to study abroad was made on a complete whim. A bunch of my friends were going and I loved my trip to Mexico so I decided that I was ready to travel further away from home. We arrived in January and I ended up loving it so much, I stayed until July. At first I was scared because I was in a place where I could not be home the next day if I needed. However, by the end of the experience, I was backpacking across Europe over the summer. My dad was nervous I would not come home because I kept extending my trip.

This study abroad trip was an opportunity for Ellen to expand her independence and broaden her view point even more. She loved her experience in Mexico, it left her curious and wanting to learn more. Once she realized the world was as vast as it is, it is hard to not wonder what else is out there. During her time in Spain, Ellen started to realize that her experiences were changing her, growing her independence even more. For the first time in her life, she had to be completely responsible for herself.

I think this experience is where I really grew as a person. I had to save and manage my money, checking my bank account frequently. When I was in Mexico, the host family bought the groceries and cooked for me. In Spain, I had to do my own grocery shopping and food preparation. In addition to the friends I traveled with, we made more American friends from around the area or that we met in class. Our group became very tight knit. We went to class together, tried new restaurants, and traveled together. On the weekends, our group traveled to various locations in Europe so I had to always be money conscientious. My friends would say that I was very close to my family and a daddy's girl, relying on them frequently. After time, I became more fearless, not as scared or nervous, willing to figure things out on my own.

Ellen explained that it took her time to become comfortable taking care of her own affairs. She was accustomed to having her parents and friends to ask for help if needed. With every interaction, her critical thinking skills developed and it became easier for her to navigate and comprehend unfamiliar surroundings. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the culture where she studied abroad, Ellen wanted and needed to participate in every cultural situation that was different or new.

I remember eating cow tongue and cow brains. I wanted to try everything to optimize my experience and I enjoyed every minute. I gained confidence in not knowing and comfortable in approaching people knowing my Spanish was bad and just going with it. I was not embarrassed, maybe a little nervous, but I knew it was not a big deal. The world was not going to end and that was something I

came to realize, what were the big things and what were not the big things. I learned to take the chance. All those situations taught me critical thinking skills, continuously asking myself, where am I and where am I going. I had to use maps, buy a new cell phone, and figure out the money exchange rate. I could not function on autopilot. I had to think through every problem.

While in Spain, Ellen learned to consider the magnitude of her new reality and how it affected, not only her, but those that cared about her half a world away. Certain situations had significant impacts because the culture was different or unknown.

I remember one weekend, we were planning a trip to Morocco and there was a terrorist bombing on a train in Spain. We had to cancel all our travel plans. My family and friends were calling and messaging me to check and see if I alright. To me, it was not that big of a deal because it was nowhere near where we were. It would be in comparison of a bomb going off in another state in the United States. However, I think since I was so far away, other people did not realize the actual distance.

Adjusting to the new culture was difficult, having to learn the customs and habits to acclimate to her new surroundings. Over time, she acclimated well to the culture with practice and patience. However, when she returned home after experiencing something as life changing as study abroad, it was more challenging than she expected to assume life back home when the people around her have not endured the same transformation.

I remember coming back and realizing that the hardest part was not going, but actually coming back. I had experienced this 'thing' that made me grow and

change as a person that my friends, from Louisiana, had not done. Even to this day, many of my friends have never been outside of Louisiana, much less the United States and here I was 20 years old living in Spain for six months. It made me fearless. I was not afraid to travel by myself, walk in a room where I did not know anyone, or take a chance and go on an adventure. I was just braver and my critical thinking skills had been magnified. Overall, when I came home, I had experienced all these things and that made me feel disconnected from my childhood friends.

#### **Study Abroad Experiences Used in Student Affairs**

In order to understand how to use the skills Ellen learned and understand the cultural differences, personal reflection was necessary to gauge personal growth. With the understanding of how she had changed; as a student affairs professional she could translate her experiences to others and maximize other's personal understanding and growth.

To this day, my study abroad experiences taught me to be brave. Whenever, I start to question myself or become hesitant, I tell myself I lived in a foreign country by myself when I was 20. I can handle this problem. I remind myself to be brave and adventurous. The experience taught me to live an optimal life, not to do the same thing over and over again. I figured out that I need to explore and be continuously learning. Study abroad taught me to continuously learn in all aspects of life, in and out of the classroom. Not just reading a book, but



immersing myself by trying new foods, new locations, new activities, and talking to new people.

Ellen knew that her experiences had changed her and that she could use that change in her profession to educate others. She understood that working in student affairs meant educating students to become global citizens by providing them learning environments and opportunities to grow as individuals. From her experiences, she now understood the impact and growth that study abroad provided was vital to transferring her knowledge to everyday practices.

As a student affairs professional, studying abroad helped me in so many different ways. First, it helped me develop empathy with people. Knowing that my way of life is not everyone's way of life. It is not better or worse, simply different.

When you grow up in America, I think you automatically believe that America's way of life is the best, but when I went to Mexico and Spain, their life was great too. Second, I learned how to see and evaluate life from a different perspective and teach my students how to do the same. I challenged the students in everything they did, asking them why we do something this way or why not another way when they planned and hosted events or programs. Third, I encouraged them to recruit organizational members from different backgrounds to better represent the student body of the university. Working to teach our staff and students to actively recruit students from various backgrounds is important to me. It makes our programs better by initiating greater dialog from different perspectives. I try to explain to them the importance of surrounding themselves

with people who do not necessarily look or act like them so they can grow as humans by being exposed to people that are different.

She explained that an important aspect of college and study abroad was that realistically not every student could afford to study abroad. Student affairs professionals needed to actively seek ways for students to be involved in diverse opportunities and interact with people from a variety of backgrounds. Ellen worked with many students that did not have the money to study abroad. She felt her experiences in other countries allowed her to provide more authentic opportunities for students to learn.

I think an important thing to realize as a student affairs professional is that study abroad is a privileged experience, especially for me since I studied abroad twice.

I understand that most of my students will never have the means or opportunity to study abroad. Therefore, I feel it is my responsibility to help students find scholarships or even opportunities without leaving the city. There are tons of community organizations in the area and on campus that students can participate in to expose them to various cultural events.

The city where her university was located had a unique culture compared to other cities. Although poverty stricken, the city had a certain spirit about it that reflected its history and diverse people. Ellen took advantage of what her city and university had to offer to provide her students with as many opportunities as possible to learn and grow. She identified the areas her students struggled, specifically the social skills needed to interact with people different from themselves.

Students today just do not know how to interact or they are scared of being outside their comfort zone. Being a student affairs professional, I had to be intentional about everything. Intentional about creating groups, intentional when planning programming, intentional when recruiting from different student populations so I could create situations for students to communicate with others different from themselves. If I attended an event and saw all white students, that was a problem because my department was not doing our job reaching all students. We needed to figure out why a more diverse group of students did not know about the event or why they did not attend.

For Ellen, intentionality was key in her programming for students. She had learned through experience that programs with clear learning objectives were more likely to impact students in a more effective way. Her learning objectives also included life and social justice issues so her students could learn how to function in a diverse society.

Collaboration is another tool I highly encourage when working with student groups and organizations. For example, if the student union board is hosting a movie night, why not partner with our Latino/a student organization and have a Latin themed movie night. As a professional working with students, I have to teach them the importance of collaborating with different student populations. When working with colleagues, I have to have a critical mindset and teach my staff members to have a critical mindset. When we walk into the room, we have to train ourselves to ask who is not here, who is not being included. I love the quote, “tolerance is inviting someone to the party, inclusivity is inviting them to

dance at the party.” It is not enough for our students to know about the party, we want all of them come and dance.

Study abroad had completely changed her outlook on interacting with people. In everything that she did, inclusiveness was at the center of her goals. She found that language was an important tool used to communicate. It had the power to inspire and cause pain. When communicating with others, language was often misused out of habit and laziness. She felt that student affairs professionals had a role in correcting and helping students understand what language is appropriate and why it should be used.

My staff and I drill into our students the concept of safe space. What does safe space mean? What inclusive language encourages safe space? While they understood that some words were offensive, they did not always realize other word choices, such as ‘sitting Indian style.’ When I heard them, I would correct them and then ask them to dig deeper to find out why that phrase might be inappropriate. Another word I heard a lot was lame. Every time I heard it I would ask them what lame meant and if they know where the word came from. More often than not, they had no idea. I would explain that the word lame came from not being able to walk, being physically handicap. When they reflected on their word choice they realized they did not want to use that word for what they were trying to describe. Asking if they would say lame in front of someone in a wheelchair helped them understand how hurtful one word could be.

Something as simple as correcting word choice was a building block for Ellen to start conversations and for students to ask questions about diversity, inclusion, and

intercultural competence. Because intercultural education can be complex, Ellen took advantage of every opportunity to broaden a student's viewpoint.

I always strive to create a space where it is okay to ask questions and if they use the wrong word, no one is going to get mad at them. I never want to shame someone. I am aware that being from somewhere like Louisiana, inappropriate words are going to be said, but I have never been successful educating someone by shaming them. When I train student leaders, I tell them if someone says something inappropriate in a group setting, quickly let them know we do not talk that way and then drop it. Then later, pull them aside and have a conversation about word choice. The worst thing to do is embarrass them, then they never want to come back to the event. We want to create a space that welcomes all students, but also one where they can ask questions and learn.

Even the smallest correction in habit or challenge in way of thinking could cause a snowball effect in a student's understanding of inclusiveness. To help students create safe spaces for their peers, Ellen believed student affairs professionals are responsible for creating safe spaces for their students. She expressed that one of the most important first steps in creating safe spaces and connecting with students was being vulnerable and showing students it is okay for them to be vulnerable as well.

For me, being vulnerable is something I hate doing, but it is necessary and I share how I feel with my students. However, people like vulnerability. It is hard to talk about my insecurities. I think I come off as very professional, organized, and kind of a perfectionist. When I let my guard down and let others know that I am

embarrassed about something, students see that I am uncomfortable but owning my feelings. For example, I know that my background is upper middle class. I grew up extremely privileged. I attended private school and studied abroad. I am embarrassed by that. I understand my privilege and try to teach others about it. I know I have to talk about it because other students may have similar feelings. Talking with them and letting them know that I do not know everything and I am still learning, even at age 30. I think the students respect that vulnerability.

Reflection and sharing are common elements used in student affairs programs, especially at retreats and during team building. Students are often separated randomly, each group with one or two staff members instigating conversation. The programs take place somewhere private away from large crowds so students feel more comfortable sharing with the group. Ellen has had numerous times to express her vulnerability and craft it into something she can use to teach her students about themselves and about others.

I tell them it is my job to make sure they can learn all this stuff at 18 so they do not have to wait until they are older. I remind them when they grow up they will have to work with people from different backgrounds. The more information they can gain as a student about how to effectively communicate, the better they will be able to work with a variety of people.

When she explained about being vulnerable, I could see on her face that it was something she was uncomfortable with, but her persistence in doing what was best for her students was admirable. Ellen knew that connecting with students was key to helping

them learn and develop. She continued by sharing that working in higher education could be both a privilege and a hindrance when considering cultural development opportunities.

Personally, working in higher education has been a privilege, however it has also hindered me. Everyone I work with is usually pretty progressive, earned their masters or doctorate and right now with the presidential election, I do not understand how Trump won. It scared me because there is a big disconnect between the people who work in higher education and middle class America or those who do not attend college. I think sometimes, I have to double check my privilege of working in this profession. We talk about safe spaces and inclusivity every day. My friends that do not work in higher education do not talk about that stuff.

Ellen had reached a level of education and understanding of intercultural competence that allowed her to influence and educate others. She found it encouraging to work in an atmosphere where her colleagues were also culturally aware, but had to be cognizant she was also working in a safe space created for learning and needed to address that when working with students who live outside that space. Ellen had created an environment at her university that reflected her students' interests, including organizations, work spaces, student-inspired art, and, when possible, a staff that mirrored the student population.

I have to remember that when I teach students to create safe spaces and have meaningful conversations, it is always within a college setting, whether on or off

campus. I must also teach them how to do those same things at home and with friends not in college. I think we are often missing that piece. My students frequently talked about being in this great little college bubble where it is cool to be diverse and inclusive. Then they go home and do not know how to communicate their new found self without sounding like the 'smart college kid.' That is something student affairs professionals need to work on, teaching students how to share their knowledge of how to be accepting and inclusive without being superior.

#### **Personal Awareness of Affects from Study Abroad Experiences**

Working in student affairs, Ellen was able to find herself among like-minded people. The kind of higher education professionals who believed in helping students develop character traits that support diversity and inclusiveness. They also strived to teach students empathy and kindness by providing educational environments to broaden students' viewpoints. She found that there were some generational differences among student affairs professionals based on personal and professional experiences. Some of the differences were easily noted and others subtler. She had to keep these differences in mind when transitioning from one setting to another and when educating students about diversity and inclusion.

I am used to being around people who look different than me. I advise and teach, so every week I would be in a meeting with 15 others and be the only white person in the room. That does something to you. You realize your privilege and you check your privilege. It is a teachable moment for me. Now when I am in



the room, I do not even think about it, but I also think about how a lot of white people do not get that experience. Study abroad opened the door for me to experience what it means to be the minority. I think students started seeing me as an advocate because I would make an effort to go to their programs, support them, and be the only white person in the room. For other professionals, especially those that do not have the day to day opportunity to interact with students, they may be scared or uncomfortable, feeling like that they are stepping on someone's toes. Living in Louisiana, white and black issues are still very tense. Recently, we have been focusing on civility. You do not have to have the same viewpoints as me, but we are all entitled to our own viewpoints. I think study abroad helped me say sometimes this is my viewpoint, but I will consider your viewpoint and maybe my viewpoint will change.

Study abroad helped Ellen not only understand her role in educating students, but also understand others who had not had study abroad experiences. She could better explain her actions and adjust how she worked with her colleagues. Her intent on making sure students were provided the educational opportunities to develop the skills they needed to work with a variety of people drove the planning of her programs. What students could not learn in the classroom, she hoped they would gain through intentional programming and multicultural experiences provided through student affairs.

I am really disheartened when I hear certain majors do not require foreign language or sociology classes. Whatever the major is, students will have to work with other people and they are going to have to know how to do that. If students

cannot study abroad, the least they can do is be required to take a class or two that will help expand their worldview.

Ellen took it upon herself to recognize what her university offered and what they did not so she knew how to adjust the programming student affairs was providing to fill the need of her students. She believed it was student affairs responsibility to educate students on how to become good citizens and function successfully in a diverse society.

For student affairs, I think making sure our programs are culturally diverse and we are not doing the same thing over and over. If we have a guest speaker, it could be someone from a different country or culture. Also, teaching our students about cultural sensitivity. When students host events like 'taco Tuesday' and they are just going to serve tacos. I always challenge them to think about their event and what it could imply. It could go some really bad places so having them critically think about how to incorporate different cultures and do it in a positive way is really important.

Study abroad was an extremely impactful experience for Ellen. For student affairs professionals, she believed that study abroad experiences had the ability to help professionals reach a higher level of intercultural competence, in turn, giving them the capability of providing more meaningful experiences for students to gain knowledge and skills to effectively function in a world with people from different backgrounds and cultures.

I think study abroad is in the top three most important things I have done in my life. I grew so much in Spain. I became fearless, courageous, and expanded my

viewpoint. I do not know another college opportunity that provides that to you. I think student affairs professionals have to do a better job figuring out how we can incorporate that wonderful experience into our day to day life and students' lives. In many other countries, it is normal for younger people to spend time abroad, but for some odd reason in America it is seen as something hard to do and there is this fear of doing it. Realistically, we could buy a plane ticket right now and be in another country tomorrow. The perception has to change. Student affairs professionals that have not studied abroad struggle, they cannot talk to people that look different than them or connect with students. I think study abroad directly affected my ability to create relationships with students who look different from me or come from different backgrounds.

Study abroad experiences vary based on the person, place, and length of time. It is expected to go through some amount of change, but Ellen felt strongly that there was often a factor missing. Many study abroad programs lack a debrief or re-immersion program when returning home to help students understand their experiences and adjust to their surroundings.

I am sure tons of people feel this way after studying abroad. A big component that study abroad professionals need to do is help acclimate students when they come back. I remember feeling disconnected, having this experience and not really being able to talk about it or not knowing how to talk about it. I felt different from those around me. I had changed and was embarrassed to talk about

it. Study abroad professionals should also help with how to keep up that spirit of things that are learned from study abroad and how to apply that to your life.

### **Summary and Reflection**

Ellen's experiences abroad shaped her to be the person she is today. Without those experiences, she would not be the professional that she is today. She is someone who was initially timid and enjoyed the comfort of familiarity. Study abroad forced her to take chances and build skills that she needed to be more functional in a diverse population. The skills she gained transferred directly to her career in student affairs and have been crucial in her ability to connect, engage, and educate students about intercultural competence.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Lauren**

#### **Introduction**

Lauren is a Hispanic female living on the Georgia coast. Her Mexican American heritage was evident by her olive skin and dark hair. She had a friendly and approachable personality. Lauren had a gift for listening and producing meaningful conversation. Before receiving her masters in professional communication and leadership she earned her bachelors in political science from a large, 4-year doctoral research institution in the southeastern region of the United States. She currently serves as the assistant director of multicultural affairs and is interim director of student life at a mid-size, four-year university on the Atlantic coast.

The day of the interview with Lauren was the first day I met her. She was a colleague of one of my previous higher education colleagues and friends. When I was seeking participants that fit the criteria for the study, Lauren was mentioned during casual conversation. I emailed her the information about the study and she was more than willing to participate. She loved the purpose of the study and was eager to share about her experiences.

### **Study Abroad Experiences**

Lauren participated in a dual study abroad program over the course of a summer during her undergraduate years. She spent the first part of summer in France and then flew to Romania for the remainder of her time. She explained that she had an amazing experience overall, but not every interaction went as expected.

It was an absolute blast. In France, we only focused on Paris. We did the typical touristy things like visiting the Eiffel Tower, the arc, we went to all the museums, and to Versailles. It had always been a dream of mine and I love the idea of France in general, but parts of it were a shock. I spent time with one particular friend, her family was from India. We joked around because when people would ask us where we were from, we did not want to say America because the French people made us feel uncomfortable when they found out. Even though we were born in the United States, we would automatically tell people where our families were from, India and Mexico, because their treatment of us was completely different.

Part of Lauren felt guilty because she was proud of where she was from, but she wanted to enjoy her experience instead of fighting poor American stereotypes the whole time. The group she was traveling with also spent quite a bit of time visiting institutions of higher education and high schools.

The educational system is completely different from the United States. A high school student basically has two routes. The first was somewhat a college preparation, but it was not called university. It was more difficult than going

through high school and then attending a university. It pretty much guaranteed that your life was going to be set up for you and the jobs afterwards paid better than going the other route. They focused more on math and science. Most politicians and government officials went through this route so they would have the best jobs and make a lot of money. The pressure to perform was high and the programs prestige attracted many students from China. The whole experience was eye opening, especially when comparing their curriculum to our high schools. I was like 'wow' we are really lacking.

One of the goals of Lauren's study abroad experience was to compare the educational system's in America, France, and Romania. She was disappointed with how much the American high schools were behind France in terms of curriculum and expectations for performance. Lauren was also disappointed with the attitude of a few of the locals, but understood that American stereotypes played a role.

I think my expectations were too high because I was in love with the idea of the city. You hear all these wonderful things about Paris, the city of love, and it is beautiful. However, I was really surprised by the how mean and rude the people were. I think growing up in the southern part of the United States, we take for granted 'southern hospitality.' Whether it is fake or not, it does not matter, the people still treat you with kindness. I am also considered to be a nice person, in addition to my southern hospitality I am one of those people that always cares a little more about how people are treated. I became almost resentful of the way the locals acted, but it is the way they are and I respect that as a culture.

Even though Lauren did not say it, the way she talked about some of the French's personalities led me to believe that it really altered the experience she believed she was going to have in Paris. When she hears that one of her students is planning a trip to France, she always shares about her experience so they are more prepared and aware for interactions with the locals.

We had several experiences where we were using public transportation and we were taking our time, standing around talking and the French would get really upset. They have a go, go, go mentality, similar to New Yorkers. Another example is when going up the escalator, make sure and stand to the left so people can go around you. If you are observant and really pay attention to social cues it is easier to catch on. Also, do not take for granted that everyone speaks English. French is a popular language, so people that speak English are encountered less frequently. They would actually be offended if we asked if they spoke English. They would wave their hands in our face, saying 'No!' They are a very proud people. I remember thinking in America, even though our most common language is English, we still make accommodations for people.

Lauren really loved her time in Paris, but I could tell the candor of the people tainted her overall experience. After talking about her study abroad experience in France, she was ready to move on to Romania. When we started to transition our conversation to the second part of her study abroad experience, Lauren's mood immediately changed. Her face relaxed as she started to recall her time in Romania.



Romania was really nice. Going from the rude French people to incredibly accommodating Romania was refreshing. They were in love with the American culture, the complete opposite of the French. They were asking all kinds of questions. Their favorite question was if we really used red cups for everything, referring to Solo cups. Some of the questions were even a bit uncomfortable. We were in a large group of women with only one man traveling with us. All the young guys we encountered would ask if the American girls were like what you see in the movie American Pie. Laughing but very serious at the same time we would reply, 'No, no, no, not at all.'

She explained that she and the group she traveled with were amazed by how different the Romanian culture was from the French and how mesmerized the Romanians were with them. It was a much more laid back atmosphere which Lauren's group found comforting. The amount of English the locals spoke also helped them have a more enjoyable time because they did not have to struggle with the translation.

The locals explained to us that they learned English watching television, like MTV, with the actual music videos streaming. We also saw more people taking care of their elderly which created a more respectful and caring atmosphere. The big cities were very dirty. It screamed communist era with the buildings and exposed wires. I never felt 100 percent safe in Bucharest and Craiova. We were lucky enough to travel in a large circle around the whole country. We also visited Bran and the Transylvania area, visiting the actual birthplace of Vlad the Impaler. When visiting Peles Castle, you could imagine Snow White singing in the

surrounding meadows. It was beautiful. I actually ran into a couple of Americans that were working in their tents selling trinkets. It was so interesting because we would be in the middle of nowhere on some mountain, nothing for miles, and the people in the little shops could speak English because that is what they needed to do.

While Lauren had a great time visiting Romania, she expressed that it is a country that she does not necessarily want to visit again. She was thankful that the people were friendly, but the dirtiness and poverty was abundant.

Even though it was entertaining because the Romanian people were so enthralled with us, asking us question after questions, we saw a lot of poverty and some things I do not ever want to see again in my lifetime. It was a different kind of poverty than you see in places like New York City where the homeless are dirty and sitting on the ground. The poverty in Romania was immense, more relatable to the real poverty in places like my home country, Mexico. It was devastating, little kids were running around with no shoes, barely clothed.

When explaining the poverty of Romania, I could tell this was something that deeply affected Lauren. Being from Mexico and seeing the poverty there, she already had a good idea of what it looked like compared to others who see poverty as more associated with an individual or small community instead of on a larger scale. Lauren went on to explain how their accommodations were also an adjustment and how they very much reflected the culture they were in.

The first place we stayed was very old. The university looked like it was from the communist era and so did the accommodations it provided. I remember walking in and questioning if this was really where we were staying. I do not mean to sound pretentious but I was shocked. My Indian roommate came from a very wealthy family so she was even more shaken. I had to stop and remind both of us to check our privilege. The room had no décor, a tiny television sitting in the middle of the room on what looked like a small filing cabinet. The single beds were on opposite walls and we felt so far apart, we actually decided to push them together so we would feel safer. The mattresses were only about an inch or two thick and super uncomfortable. This bathroom had a regular toilet, but the shower curtain was small and water got everywhere. It was more like a wet room, for lack of better words since there was a drain in the middle.

When Lauren's group stayed in places similar to the university, it was a reminder of how privileged she was. She had to tell herself that the accommodations were part of the experience and she wanted an authentic experience to understand the culture better. Their experiences varied on where they stayed.

The bed and breakfasts we stayed in were amazing. More home style cooked meals and they had their own animals on site. I ate the best chicken I have ever tasted in my entire life, even though I am pretty sure, I met it the day before.

When we visited the university, the professor explained that the government had given out loans to many farmers to build up areas with small hotels and bed and breakfasts to attract tourists. We would be driving down the road and suddenly

there would be a random building being erected because of those loans. It was really interesting to know that. The last place we stayed, the university was new so the accommodations were a lot better. They were very modern, but again, nothing on the walls and simple bedding.

Study abroad was an experience that highly impacted Lauren's life. Reflecting on her time in France and Romania made her realize how thankful she was to live in America and the opportunities that she has been provided.

I think that it has made me more grateful for the opportunities that I have here in the United States. I hear a lot of people rag on us about how dumb we are and how poor our education system, and I am always say 'Well, no. That is not actually true.' It has made me proud of where I come from. We have work to do, but every country does. I am also grateful for what I do have, as far as, my job, my things, et cetera. There is a reason why we call this country the land of opportunity and if it was not the best country in the world there would not be millions of people trying to get in.

### **Study Abroad Experiences Used in Student Affairs**

Not only did Lauren's study abroad experiences change the way she viewed the world, it encouraged her to share how important she thought study abroad was for a student's development. If students had the opportunity, she wanted them to take it so they could broaden their views of the world.

I always encourage all my students to study abroad because it opened my eyes to the way other people live, their cultures, their social norms, what is acceptable,

and what is not. It is so important for us to have this worldly view because the world is only getting smaller. I try and tie it to their future jobs. One day they may be in marketing and travel all over the world, but they need to be aware that what is acceptable here is not acceptable in Japan or wherever they are.

Even though Lauren did not officially study abroad in Mexico, she has spent a large amount of time there with family. Her experiences, though not in an educational setting, were just as impactful as her time spent studying abroad. Maybe even more so since she was immersed deeper in the culture because it was a part of who she is as a Mexican American. She can provide first-hand knowledge to her students that are interested in moving to Mexico or a similar country, in terms, of opportunity compared to America.

I always want to make sure I tell my students that want to go back to Mexico, for whatever reason, that if that is what they want to do, okay, but wait. Wait because the opportunities that you are provided here cannot even compare to what you will not be provided over there. Working over there is incredibly difficult. Job protection is a joke. They protect their citizens, but foreigners do not really work out that well over there. If you are Mexican American or have simply lived in America, they treat you differently, especially when it comes to the language. If they hear even a little of that English twang, you are treated completely different.

#### **Personal Experiences Abroad Used in Student Affairs**

Lauren transitioned more of the conversation to focus on her feelings and experiences of Mexico. Even though it was not about her actual study abroad experience,

the knowledge she provided shed light on another culture. Specifically, how her American culture interacted with and coupled with her and her families' Mexican culture.

It can be exhausting, both here and there, being constantly pulled in both directions and you are never enough for either one. It reminds me of a quote from the movie *Selene*, "You have to be more Mexican than the Mexican and more American than the American, both at the same time."

I asked Lauren to expand more on her life as a Mexican American. She explained that she never felt completely American or completely Mexican, leaving her somewhere in middle. Even though she knew her family loved her, she did not always feel accepted. She found herself defending against stereotypes from people in America and from her family and friends in Mexico.

I am not going to lie, I feel like the brunt of the joke half the time. My family is always talk about how my Spanish is not perfect or how I have an accent. They zero in on it saying 'wait a minute, say that again.' I live in Georgia and everyone asks what it is like to have my family in Mexico. I think I can offer a different perspective to what most people think when they think of Mexico. People often stereotype Mexico as very poor, but I come from a family that is very wealthy there. They are considered to be your upper middle class and have no desire to immigrate to the United States.

It was interesting to hear about Lauren's family because I had never spoken to someone that was from an upper middle class family in Mexico. She described their way of life, what their homes looked like, and the types of jobs they had. As an American,

she was surprised when some of her family members expressed no interest in traveling to America, ever.

My brother-in-law actually told me once, 'if I had not married your cousin, I would have never gone to the United States, not even to sight see.' I think a lot of upper middle class Mexicans feel that way. The people we see immigrating are from lower income levels looking for opportunities. If people are happy they are not going to leave.

I was even more surprised when she explained where her family was geographically. They were less than 100 miles south of the Texas border and they still had no curiosity to travel across the border. She did share that they would cross the border for shopping trips, but that even came with its own dangers.

They go on day long shopping trips across the bridge sometimes. My family would leave super early in the morning so they could return home early because the later it got the worse the crime would be when trying to return. The drug lords and other criminals have a habit of stopping people that are coming from the north and steal all of the stuff the people just bought. Quiet literally, they stop them in the middle of the highway with guns, like some kind of road pirates. It is very scary and very real.

Lauren continued, explaining that a few years ago, the crime was even worse. Her uncle would tell her not to come and visit at certain points because they would have people watching and waiting for people that looked like tourists traveling across the border. Despite Lauren's strong bicultural upbringing, she explained that it was not until

study abroad that she realized the impact her heritage had on her. She could not recognize those differences until experiencing a completely different culture because she was too familiar with her Mexican culture.

I transitioned the conversation, asking for Lauren to share how her combined experiences of study abroad and her Mexican heritage have affected her professional disposition of intercultural competence in the workplace.

I just moved into this office with my interim position and I think all of us bring little pieces of our culture into our office. It is really important to me. I have flyers from my travels and little trinkets. I do that on purpose because, one, it is important to me and I want to stare at them. Two, they are a conversation starter. They spur questions.

Around Lauren's office were pieces from her trips to France, Romania, and Mexico. She had artful flyers, beautifully painted skulls, and other crafty and colorful pieces. When meeting with students or student organizations about an event or activity they were planning, Lauren explained that almost always, the student would wonder off and start asking questions about the cultural pieces in her office.

They will suddenly ask, 'Oh, you have been to Romania? I had no idea. How was it? What were the people like?' This amazing conversation starts and students don't ever think about going there. I tell them they need to go. When they figure out that I have also been to France, they start asking about the common stereotypes. 'Were they really that rude?' And I say, 'Yes, yes they were.' I can corroborate that.



Lauren used these conversations as opportunities to broaden students' perspectives, not only about other cultures, but about the possibility of them pursuing those experiences for themselves. Many students she encountered were worried about being able to afford the cost of studying abroad, but Lauren would encourage them to push past that boundary and look for every option in order to have the experience.

It is about sort of planting that seed and helping them realize that they can have experiences abroad. When I was an undergrad, I had nothing. My husband and I were poor, but we figured out a way. I encourage them to talk to financial aid and the international education office about scholarships. I think that students often see something like study abroad, unattainable and for people that have money. I tell them even if they have to pay for it back later, do it, because it will be the most wonderful and rewarding experience of their life.

Lauren used her skin color and heritage as a way to identify with students and give them the encouragement they may needed to take a chance on something that would change their life. Because students could see a piece of themselves in her, they were more willing to believe in themselves. They could see that they had a future because she had created one for herself.

In multicultural affairs, I worked with a large number of black and brown students. As soon as they start getting to know me or their friends talk, they see me as this beacon and they can come to me for anything. They see me as something that potentially gets them, maybe understanding an immigrant

experience or first generation experience. They can trust me, I think, and that serves everyone well. I would never turn down a student, ever.

One of Lauren's main job responsibilities was helping student organizations plan and host events for the campus population. She also was a lead in planning the two diversity weeks that her department, one in the spring and one in the fall, held for the students. The diversity weeks were one of her largest opportunities to expose students to other cultures.

That's our opportunity to start to tap into other cultures. We have done the festival of lights in the past, focusing on the Greek culture. We provided transportation to the Greek festival held downtown. There is a fairly large Greek population here in our city. We really want to try to something like an Irish and Gaelic festival.

Focusing on a larger presence, the campus is 8.4% Hispanic. That accounts for about 600 students. Lauren shared that they are a very lively population, small but mighty, and they make themselves heard. The students created a Hispanic outreach and leadership program that Lauren provides guidance for. When explaining what they do, I could tell that she was completely amazed by how far they had come and the quality of services and programs they provide for students.

They provide monthly lunch and learns, bring in speakers from all over the country, and do community service projects. Their main goal with everything they do is to provide students a family away from home. The largest endeavor

they take on is during the months of September and October, where they host numerous events for Hispanic heritage month.

Lauren continued, telling me about how the Hispanic organization collaborated with faculty to write grants to host a film festival on campus. The organization brought five to six films, showing one every week. She said they ended the celebration with a Fiesta Day, which was a massive celebration for their small campus, attracting over 500 students from various backgrounds.

We have food from various countries in Latin America. We dance. We have a piñata, games, giveaways. We have our Spanish faculty present on topics of their choosing. This last year, we brought gender and women's studies' professors in to participate. I have heard in between all the wonderful events that are hosted, students are planning smaller events, like game nights. It has grown so much from two years ago, when the celebration was just a week.

By encouraging and supporting students to hold events that they care about, Lauren feels that the students believe that the university buys into them. She expressed how the students loved seeing the faculty interacting with students outside of the classroom. The faculty also started including the cultural events on their syllabi, which the students respected even more because the faculty were supporting the students' initiatives to other students.

On top of the Hispanic heritage events, we also have a black heritage month that kicks off with a MLK parade followed by 30 plus events. It has a similar structure to the Hispanic heritage month. The big difference is the MLK dinner

we hold at the end to recognize faculty, staff, and community members that have brought wonderful things to the black community in our city. Those heritage months are a staple of what our office does. Now, that I have moved into a new office, I would really like to bring a lot of that here.

### **Personal Awareness of Affects from Study Abroad Experiences**

Lauren sees her transition from the assistant director of multicultural affairs to include the responsibilities of the interim director of student life as an opportunity to bring more cultural awareness to everything student affairs does on campus. Because of her experiences, she believes that the more students are exposed to, the more they will grow and develop as individuals. She wants to use her new position to impact even more students.

I think one of my biggest concerns with all universities, not just this one, is that everybody thinks it is only multicultural affairs job to educate students about diversity, but its everyone's. When I was told that I was the first Latina Mexican American to hold the position in the history of the university, I was shocked. I was so worried students weren't going to come and see me anymore, but after I started, students walked into my office and chatted me up just like before. I was so relieved.

Knowing that her relationship had not changed with the students, Lauren had an energizing spirit about her new position. She could bring a new perspective to the position that it may not have had before or at least in a long time. Even though she

understood what and who she represented in her new position, it was still surprising when students pointed it out to her.

One student in particular came into my office and I asked if he needed anything.

He said no, he just liked seeing me there. I asked what he meant because he was in my office all the time. He said, 'No, I don't think you realize it, Lauren, but it is important and I hope that people have been telling you that because it is a big deal and I am proud of you.'

I could tell when she told me about what her student had said, in that moment she felt the just how heavy her new responsibilities were and what they could mean to any student that identified with her. She was empowered and felt blessed by the knowledge she had gained from her experiences. Lauren understood that she was in a special place and could do a lot of good things for the campus.

Everything that I have learned in my entire life, whether it was from study abroad or from who I am, I am very proud of my dual cultural background. I bring that into everything that I do and I think the students see that and respect it. I want to build more relationships with my white and Asian students that interact with this office. If I can share my experiences and connect with them the way I have with my other students, hopefully I can create opportunities for their programs to be more culturally inclusive. I believe my ties with multicultural affairs are going to benefit all of our students.

Lauren could notice a difference between students involved with her programs and those that were not. She could see how they changed, how they grew. She knows

that it was not directly from her but from what her office believed in and how the staff members took that belief and implemented it into everything they did. Her experiences and her background made her that much better at her job.

I have seen their leadership go from zero to 100 in a matter of a semester or two.

The minute we 'capture' a particular student, usually during their second semester, they go from this shy first year student to a vibrant organization officer or maybe even a student that takes it upon themselves to start a new organization.

By sharing her experiences, Lauren has encouraged many students at her university to try study abroad for themselves. She had one student that decided to visit the Czech Republic because of a discussion about her trip to Romania. The student even decided to travel to multiple countries while she was in Europe. Lauren loved following up with the student afterwards to hear about all her adventures.

I think they are more eager to learn about the other cultures. It is much more than just wanting to sight see, they want to immerse themselves. They are willing to venture out of the hotel or off the boat to have a more authentic experience.

Lauren explained that the Office of Multicultural Affairs offered a summer coastal experience for multiple students every year traveling up the east coast. Even though the office provided the popular sightseeing tours, their goal was to provide a more immersive experience.

My boss actually lived in New York for ten years so she always had new places to add to the itinerary that provided a more organic experience. Many of the

students we serve have never been out of the state and when we take them to conferences, it is their first time on a plane.

Providing opportunities for students to learn about different places and new cultures, even if inside the United States, was important to Lauren because she understood how much it impacted her life. The encouragement that she received in college to study abroad was an important factor in her choice to travel. She wanted to be that inspiration for others. With a diverse student population, Lauren was able to bring numerous students together to learn from each other.

When I first started three and a half years ago, Hispanic activity and multicultural affairs were two separate offices. When the director of Hispanic activity retired, our vice-president placed it under the multicultural affairs umbrella. There was still a division between the black and brown students so we knew it was something we had to change and we did.

Lauren was instrumental in creating a new standard of involvement in the multicultural office. In order for students to run and participate in student organizations, they were required to attend certain events that encouraged communication between multiple organizations. It took a few months for the initial changes to be seen, but when they started happening, Lauren knew the office was moving in the right direction.

Sometimes people need to be pushed together for their own good. They need to be made uncomfortable and let them take off. All of sudden we started hearing different languages coming from our student lounge, which was typically where

our African American students hang out. We paused our meeting next door to peek in. It was a wonderful site to see everyone together.

The mindset of the student body started to change because of the direction Lauren and her boss pushed the students. They did not want to overwhelm the students, instead, they made small changes to redirect student energies. She explained that when they travel for conferences they would see the same type of separation. Lauren and her staff were intentional in creating uncomfortable spaces to interact with different people in the group.

One time we were in Philadelphia and I had everyone count off one, two, one, two. The students were split up in vans based on their number. At first the vans were quiet, then all of a sudden everybody started talking and they were fine.

When we arrived at the empire state building, they decided to stay in their groups they were placed with in the vans.

Lauren explained that because they made them uncomfortable, they were able to become comfortable because they had no one else to communicate with. Once they opened up and accepted their position they decided to take the opportunity to get to know each other better and bond. Connecting students was something that Lauren strived to do in all of her organizations and activities.

Transitioning the conversation back to Lauren and asking if she could do the job in the same way without her study abroad experiences, she replied, absolutely not. She was someone that believed in her past experiences having a strong influence in shaping



her life. Lauren not only had her study abroad experience but also her personal family experiences traveling back and forth to Mexico.

I learned a lot in Romania and in France, going back to that sense of privilege and being grateful but also aware of how others live. If I had never seen something like that firsthand, the little boy with no shoes, it rocks you to the core.

She shared that she fell in love with travel because of things that she had seen and that would not have happened if she would not have gone in the first place. Lauren explained that it is like an itch that needs to be scratched, traveling and experiencing new cultures is always in the back of her mind. I believe it was one reason that made her good at her job because she had the opportunity to interact with different students from various cultures. That helped satisfy that need to go just a little more.

If I had not gone to those places, I would not be able to have the conversations with my students and convince them that studying abroad is worth the risk. I would not have the trinkets in my office to spark conversations. I feel like there is an entire world out there that I want to see, I need to see, not only to make it better for my family but for what I do.

### **Summary and Reflection**

Lauren's study abroad experience coupled with her Mexican American heritage provided a unique perspective on her development of intercultural competence and how she used that knowledge to create a professional disposition in her student affairs career. Her understanding of cultural differences while growing up was a large factor in how she interacted and connected with students. After studying abroad and adding a third

perspective to her cultural knowledge, Lauren was able to further develop her intercultural competence making her even more effective in educating students.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **Confetti**

#### **Introduction**

Confetti is a white female in her early 30's from and currently living in Ohio. Her curly hair and big smile echoed her joyful personality and 'go, go, go' mentality. Even though she is not very tall, her presence could be noticed across a room. Confetti received her bachelor's degree in journalism and her master's degree in college student personnel from Ohio University. She served as dean of co-curricular design at a small liberal arts, private not-for-profit university in the Midwest. In addition to her responsibilities as dean, Confetti had also launched her own business selling creative art and spoke at various speaking engagements about leadership across the country. Constantly juggling her numerous activities, she stayed grounded through her personal values and the close relationships she had with her friends and family.

Like Ellen, I also met Confetti at the national leadership institute hosted by the National Association of Campus Activities. Our second year working the institute together, I served as her chair-elect. It was during that time, I built a more solid professional relationship with her. She had worked in the student affairs field longer than

I, so I took every opportunity to ask her questions and learn from her. Since then, she has served as a professional resource throughout my career in higher education.

### **Study Abroad Experience**

Confetti studied abroad in Pamplona, Spain, during the summer of her junior year of her undergraduate studies. Her university provided a program through their study abroad office allowing nine students to travel to Spain and live with local residents.

I lived with a woman named Pilar who was in her late 50s or early 60s and her son, who was about 30. She also had another study abroad student from Taiwan living with her. They had a dog named Boss, which I never fully understood why he had an English name. Pilar said it was for Bruce Springsteen.

As she started to share about her experience abroad, I was amazed with how much she knew about Spain and her confidence when speaking about the culture.

Confetti explained that Pamplona was in the northeast region of Spain, near France.

Pamplona is in Basque country which is a totally different culture than most regions of Spain. It is famous for the Running of the Bulls during the summer. It is called San Fetaminas which is a ten-day festival. I was there right during that time.

The decision to study abroad was a difficult one for Confetti. Not because she was afraid to go, but because she was afraid to leave. She was a very active student on campus, holding multiple leadership positions and a job at the university radio station. She decided a trip during the summer would allow her to keep her activities during the year and experience a trip abroad.

I was really hesitant in undergrad to go abroad because my student leadership roles were really important to me. I was worried I would not be eligible to keep my roles in the programming board or radio station if I went during the academic year. I had seen people be like, “They would be a really good candidate but they are going abroad.” Also, I had a major FOMO [fear of missing out] in undergrad.

Once abroad, she did not quite have the experience she had hoped for when creating personal relationships. Confetti found this deeply disappointing because friendship was important to her and she was thousands of miles away from hers. While there, she took three classes at the university, Universidad Publica de Navarra.

We took a Spanish class, which was my minor, one cultural class, and one history class. There was also an informal class that met every other week that we were required to attend that took field trips. The only people in my class were the women I traveled there with from my university. I remember not feeling a strong connection to any of the women, but made friends with a couple of them out of necessity.

The university she attended provided students from Pamplona as conversational partners. Confetti was excited about this opportunity so that she could practice speaking Spanish. However, with text messaging becoming the new craze, she found it frustrating communicating that way instead of simply calling each other. Reflecting on that fact, she found it ironic how popular text messaging is today.

It was hard at times because the program was not set up to meet a lot of people outside of our host family. I thought my conversational partner would be a cool

experience because it would be someone close to my age that I could build a relationship with. Texting was just becoming a thing at that time so we would text message each other to set up a place to meet. It was trying to communicate this way. When we finally settled on a place to meet, I did not even know what she looked like because we could not send pictures back then.

The first contact with her conversational partner was what Confetti would consider a cultural struggle. She was aware of the appropriate introduction between two people in Spain, but was still surprised by the situation. One of her main goals during the trip was to not look dumb, but with this encounter she was completely embarrassed.

I am waiting for her and she finally arrives. In Spain, it is common to kiss on both cheeks with friends. I did not think this would happen because she was not my friend. She goes in for the double kiss and I am so not accustomed to it, I do it power style, like boom, boom, superfast. She ends up kissing my nose and she is so freaked out. I'm embarrassed and trying to say sorry. It is just the worst meeting possible, especially because I am so nervous in a new country to speak the language, not screw up, not offend people, and not look stupid.

During their meetings, they would normally go for a walk because Confetti did not have a lot of extra money because she was paying for the study abroad trip herself. She was not confident in her Spanish, but she tried anyways. She wanted to take advantage of the opportunity she had to learn whatever she could.

We would normally go for a walk and just talk. I was so nervous about my Spanish that my conversation topics focused on 'what is your favorite' because

that was the only thing I knew how to say confidently. It never felt natural. I think it was a bust overall because I never felt like she wanted to hang out with me. She was really slow to return my texts...it just felt weird.

Unfortunately, she only met with her partner three times over the summer and when they did meet, her partner only wanted to practice English. This was yet another disappointment in the expectations she had for her study abroad experience. She was frustrated about not having more of an opportunity to speak Spanish in that situation. Despite her dissatisfaction with her conversational partner, she was able to spend time with her host mom because she did not work outside the home. The host mom also did not speak any English.

My host mom was really friendly. All the mistakes I would make with language, she would laugh off. She was a very expressive person, so the faces she would make as she listened to me talk would sometimes make her cringe. I could tell she was thinking, “what is this child trying to communicate?” It was awesome and I really appreciated it because it helped me learn.

When Confetti shared about her experience with her host mom, I could tell that it was a time that meant something special to her. It was a very authentic experience that provided her with an accurate representation of what life in Spain looked like from day to day. She only spoke Spanish in the home and she was home often since that is where she ate.

She would cook dinner and lunch for me and I got to know the culture more and more. She hilariously loved to cook American food and thought that I really

wanted American food, which I did not. When she cooked a Spanish dish, I would try to reiterate how much I liked it hoping that would encourage her to keep making those dishes. I finally had to explain to her that I liked when she cooked Spanish food because who knew when I would get to eat it again. She even taught me how to make some dishes.

She reflected that adjusting to a new culture takes time and an awareness to recognize differences in order to alter habits and ways of thinking. Confetti started to notice how the lifestyle she lived in America did not fit the life she needed to live in Spain. The culture was different and she had to make certain changes to her daily schedule. One significant difference she noticed was that the biggest meal of the day was lunch and not dinner.

It is customary to have a long, huge lunch and a very small dinner which is nothing that I am used to. I am a big productivity person, so at first, I would not go home for lunch so I could get homework done and enjoy the daytime. I realized I was missing my opportunity to connect with the family because lunch was their main meal. I had to rearrange my schedule to fit the Spanish schedule and that was challenging for me. I was so used to pounding everything out and being done in the evenings. I am glad that I learned to siesta.

The large lunch and siesta were cultural norms. Confetti explained at first she would try to run errands during lunch, but all the businesses were closed because they observed the long lunch and siesta tradition too. She soon adjusted her schedule to the culture so she could spend more time with her host family. She became very close with



her host mom and often found herself wanting to spend more time with her than with the other women in her program.

I had been to Spain before studying abroad and had visited quite a few places. I wanted to see everything again because this time was different, I was by myself. Looking back, because I was by myself, I felt very alone. I'm a very social person and I have a big network with tight knit relationships with friends and my sister. I was actually afraid to go to these places, which is strange for me because that is not who I am at all today. I traveled with the girls from the program, but by the third trip I realized I did not want to go anymore. I did not enjoy these women at all because of their fighting and cattiness. We were supposed to go to Paris and the night before I broke down in tears while talking with my Madre saying I did not want to go and she supported my decision to stay home.

Thinking about that incident, Confetti thought she was crazy for feeling that way and passing up a trip to Paris which she said she did not visit until ten years later. After visiting Paris, she said she did not regret not going while she was in Spain because she was able to make amazing memories with her friends and it was not tainted by bad company. While in Spain, Confetti did not let bad company ruin all of her trips.

I went to Zaragoza, Bilbao, and Barcelona, which I wanted to revisit because I loved Barcelona. It is my favorite place in Spain. We also visited Donostia-San Sebastian which is a small beach town we would walk around. It was fun and a place I had never been. All the other places I had been before and convinced others to visit.

Although Spain was not a new place for Confetti, the experience was and she learned a lot during her time there. Some of the experiences have impacted her so much she continues to use their effects on a regular basis, like learning a new language, which is a useful skill to have when working on a university campus.

One of the things that most impacted who I am now, was becoming more comfortable with the language. Since I did not have ample opportunities to practice through the study abroad program, I ended up spending a lot of time exploring Pamplona on my own. I would ride the bus, not knowing exactly where I was going, hoping that I had read the map right and interpreted the language.

Confetti had studied Spanish in school, but the Spanish used in Spain was different. She explained that the accent was very 'lispy' and the dialect was a little different. It took time for her to feel comfortable figuring it out on her own. I think after she became comfortable with herself and realized that her language skills did not have to be perfect, she was more willing to try and ended up learning much more.

When I decided to make the most of my experiences, I started putting myself out there. Some of the other women I traveled with would freeze up when we needed to ask for directions. I just had to learn to be like, "Well someone has to ask." I wanted to be the person who tries and I felt that went a long way with the local people. I think I learned to be more willing to be wrong and just make the effort. I also grew to appreciate authentic human connection there because I oftentimes did not feel like I had it.

Another aspect of the Spanish culture that greatly impacted Confetti were the celebrations. She was there over summer during San Fermin which included multiple activities and parties. This was another chance for her to adjust to and celebrate the culture where she was living. It also provided her an opportunity to step outside of her comfort zone.

Every day you wear white, all white, with a red belt. You want to know how much white I owned when I got there? None! We wore that every night for the ten-day festival. There was also a fireworks show every night to go and watch. Even though Running of the Bulls was every day, there was also something different going on that made it feel like whole new festival each day. The best part was everybody participated, the whole city shut down. It made me feel like we were doing something wrong in America.

In terms of developing intercultural competence, Confetti described that she had to keep an open mind during her cultural encounters. She had to continually remind herself to look at the world through others' lens and not just her own so she could better understand certain situations.

When I first got there, they had our host families come in one at a time to pick us up. In comes this woman and she looks like Mimi from The Drew Carey Show, just a little bit kooky. Of course, I am also a little bit kooky. She immediately squeals, "oh una gordita," which means a little fat one. I was blown away by this, then I remembered the few little things that I know about the Spanish culture. It was a term of endearment. It was humiliating in front of the other women in the

program, but I thought I had better get a sense of humor or this was going to be a disaster of an experience.

As she reflected on that experience, Confetti explained many of the experiences she had in Spain taught her to question and not rush to judgment so quickly. The time she spent abroad helped her approach situations differently as she continued to travel after her summer abroad. Now, she is an avid traveler, going out of the country at least twice a year for at least a couple of weeks at a time.

There is a lot of things that can go wrong when I am traveling and of course there are language and cultural barriers. I think I am a much more patient traveler than most folks. I understand that with travel delays there is nothing I can do about it so why stress out. If I take the time, I start to notice little things happening, cultural things that I may not have noticed if I was rushing around or stressing out.

### **Study Abroad Experiences Used in Student Affairs**

The skill of patience that she gained and her acceptance that there are factors in her life that she cannot control directly translated to her role as a student affairs professional. The university where Confetti worked had a large international student population. She explained that because of her cultural experiences while studying abroad, she was able to be more patient with her international students and the cultural differences they presented while studying in the United States.

My international students are the friendliest. One of my students hugs too long American-wise. I have to think, so? He's hugging too long? For what reason?

Why waste my time on that. For him, it feels comfortable and it is not coming from a weird place. Go ahead with your long hug, I am not going to worry about it. I think it has made me better at helping to explain or to give my students the context and opportunity to show more grace.

Confetti was able to accept students' cultural differences quicker and without question. She had taught herself to ask why so that she could understand their point of view and reason for doing something a certain way. As a student affairs professional, the ability to pause and ponder can be essential because professionals spend so much time with students in real life situations. She explained that she was able to assist students in understanding cultural differences in even the smallest situations.

I remember one of my first trips with a student group to a leadership conference in Orlando. I had two white students, one from the Dominican and one from the Philippines. We were out to eat and we ordered some sort of dip. The student from the Philippines, Nic, double dipped in the dip. Garrett, another student freaked out and asked Nic what they were doing. Nic does not even compute what is going on. Garrett said it was gross and there were germs. I asked Nic how food was served in the Philippines and she explained that everything is served family style. There is no such thing as double dipping.

Having the knowledge and experience to challenge a student's point of view allows the student processing the information time to question their own ideas. Confetti functioned off the belief that student affairs professionals want to teach their students to consistently question why things are the way they are because it helps with their

reflection skills and development as an individual. Confetti encourages her students to be curious and ask questions because she knows that will open communication channels for them to learn about people different from themselves.

After Nic explained more about her culture, I could see a light bulb go off for Garrett. He told Nic that he was sorry and that he never would have even thought about it that way. I think because of the experiences I have had that it has made me able to disassemble things quickly in a non-judgmental way. Instead of yelling at Garrett for how he reacted I was able to initiate a conversation that provided an opportunity for everyone to share without feeling judged.

On the university's campus, especially in their student center, there were a lot of work spaces that students had been encouraged to make their own. Confetti explained since the university had a liberal arts focus with a large endowment they had more freedom to support students with more offices and more staff.

I feel like I am very fortunate here. I have had the opportunity to be a guiding force for our students, especially with a program called Leadership Fellows. This group is made up of peer leadership consultants and educators that were active in the major leadership programs on campus. Studying abroad definitely gave me perspective on wanting to include different groups that I worked with. Our campus has about 35% multicultural students. At any given leadership program, up to 60% of students attending would be multicultural. Part of that is because we have been intentional in recruiting Fellows who are representative under my encouragement.

Confetti knew that creating environments where students could interact with people different from themselves stimulated the expansion of their viewpoint. She explained that the person overseeing assessment at the university would ask how she exhibited such high numbers of multicultural students at her events. She understood that having a variety of students from different campus communities attracted other students from those communities. Her students of color also respected their leadership roles and used the position to support other students that identified with them and encouraged multicultural interactions.

The reason they care is because that is a value that we instill in them, inclusivity. It is that way across most of the programs that I supervise and advise. It is just a value that I hold dear. However, one of the things I am most disappointed with is our ability to recruit staff who are different. It has been a major goal for me to diversify my staff. I think where we are located geographically has hindered some in this area.

Seeing how much of an impact student leaders could have on the number of multicultural students attending events, she knew that if those students felt represented on the staff side, even more could be possible. Confetti informed me about the town population and trends in where the university was located in relation to the very large city located within 60 miles. While the diversity was lacking in the small town compared to the city, very few were willing to commute so far away.

### **Personal Awareness of Affects from Study Abroad Experiences**

Following the turn in the conversation, I asked Confetti to continue by sharing what else or how else higher education may be hindered in her viewpoint because of the experiences that she had abroad. Focusing on the organizations she works with, she started by pointing out the racial separation often seen in the Greek life community. Similar to the diversity of staff members, there is not a lot of diversity in Interfraternity Council (IFC) organizations and National Panhellenic (NPC) organizations.

Our fraternities and sororities, not just at this university, separate by race. You have IFC and NPC which are not technically Caucasian or white organizations. Then you have National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) fraternities and sororities which are historically African-American. In addition, Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) organizations can be historically Asia or Latino/Latina. I understand why folks are excited to commune, but it creates a very siloed system.

This trend in Greek life bothered Confetti because it was something that she had not been able to solve on her campus yet. She wished there were more opportunities for students to be recruited from all backgrounds because she knew first-hand students can benefit from meeting and spending time with students different from themselves. She did say that she took small steps to educate Greek students about each other's councils and council culture.

I think students in IFC and NPC could benefit a lot from a multicultural perspective. The students who are looking for a multicultural aspect are joining NPHC and MGC groups. IFC and NPC do not do outreach to try to bring in



students of color either. We have tried a lot of cross-programming. We have a Black Greek 101 every semester that we require NPC and IFC executive officers to attend. This is a program for them to better understand the Black Greek culture, however it does not do much besides provide information. I want something that supports more dialog between students.

The Greek community was something that challenged her and she had not been as successful as she wanted there. One speculation for increased difficulty was the involvement and foundation of the national organizations. Diversity is not always on their top list of goals for their college and university chapters. There was another population of students that concerned Confetti in her pursuit to diversify student groups.

Lately, I have been reviewing the statistics for our students that participate in service. There are a staggering and disproportionate number of white students, somewhere around 85% of the student body involved in Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and Habitat for Humanity, etc. I ask myself why the numbers are not matching up and I have some theories. One is white people serve the community, serve folks who are lesser than the, pat themselves on the back and say "I helped you" and think yay for me.

She explained that many civically routed organizations are built in a way to address systemic issues and that students of color may not feel comfortable performing aid in that way because they may have been previous recipients. In her position, Confetti must have the welfare of all students in mind by considering the internal and external factors that affect them.

I am trying to coach my staff to think about these things. What is it going to take for us to move from the savior model of 'community service makes me feel good and that is why I do it' to a change maker model. Because I am a creative problem solver, I know we need diverse groups of people to create the best kinds of teams to solve systemic issues and solve social crises. It is not going to be easy, but it is going to be more interesting.

Confetti was very honest with the things she did well and the areas she needed to work on. She knew she had not figured out every issue affecting her students, but I could tell by the spirit in her voice she was not going to give up until she found a way to help all of her students. She wanted to use what she had learned from her experiences abroad to influence and educate students. Study abroad was something that changed her personally and affected how she interacted with her students.

I think my formal study abroad experience was very formative for me. I did not know it then, that it would be so influential on my career. Ultimately, it made me a more curious, more patient, and a more interested person. I think that the most interesting people are interested people. I am less afraid of the unknown, especially when it comes to people. I think people are inherently good and they want to connect with others.

The traits and characteristics that she honed and developed during study abroad and traveling abroad assist her in everyday interactions with her staff and students. She works to capitalize on the smallest moments to broaden points of view using communication to make connections.

For me, the lesson is that as a professional and as a person, it is about effort and trying to do the right thing and trying to communicate across differences. In the moments with Nic and Garrett, I invited someone to share their story, and ultimately invited someone else to hear that story without sharing for them.

With any teaching moment, it is important to Confetti to not make students or staff feel threatened or embarrassed. There are values and lessons she wants to instill in a way to help students with understanding others different from themselves. Overall, Confetti shared that her study abroad experience was a life changing event that still affects how she lives and how she works.

### **Summary and Reflection**

Confetti's time abroad studying and exploring provided her with the skills to adapt to numerous environments and connect with a diverse group of students. The experiences she felt and the growth she sustained as an individual sparked a curiosity that she could only fill through more travel. She naturally translated what she had learned abroad into her daily practices and interactions with students, staff, and faculty to help her university develop a more culturally competent approach to student life. Confetti, being the most experienced professional of the three participants, was able to share her view on more administrative issues found in student affairs concerning cultural and societal factors affecting students and their future and global citizens.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Narrative Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this narrative non-fiction study was to understand how student affairs professionals' personal study abroad experiences helped them grow and develop intercultural competence. In addition, the study included how student affairs professionals translated their experiences and learned skills to their careers to educate and provide opportunities for students to learn about and experience diversity, inclusiveness, and prepare them to become global citizens. Each story describes the participants' experiences including their feelings, hardships, and triumphs while immersing themselves into different cultures. Their stories also explain how study abroad impacted their interactions with students using what they learned to expand their viewpoints and opportunities to grow culturally.

#### **Narrative Analysis**

This chapter presents a narrative analysis by examining themes and patterns from the three non-fiction stories of the student affairs professionals in this study. The research questions were used as a guide to present the findings in this chapter. The major themes are discussed based on how frequently they were discussed in the participants'

stories: experience, study abroad, people, culture, and think differently. The chapter concludes with a summary of the narrative analysis.

**Experience.** The participants not only shared about their study abroad experiences, but spoke of multiple experiences that influenced their lives. They stressed the significance of even a moment being an experience worth learning from. The interviews exposed that moments could educate someone about cultural differences, influence ways of thought and actions, and alter or change values and beliefs. During her interview, Ellen told of an experience where in an instant she felt shocked, disliked, and naïve based on where she was from and her appearance. After having that experience, Ellen “wanted to be courteous, open, try new things and learn about the culture, and gain cultural confidence.” She felt the need to “break the stereotypes they had for Americans.” Ellen used that experience to realize the need to take advantage of any opportunity to help her students learn about culture, diversity, and inclusion to become more interculturally competent.

Lauren had an impactful experience when she lodged at the Romanian University. The moment she stepped into her temporary living quarters, she found herself questioning the reality of what she was being offered as accommodations. She remembered, she had “to stop and remind myself to check my privilege.” She came to appreciate the authenticity of her surrounding because it helped her understand the culture and people more. How they lived, what they valued, and who they were are the questions that guided her curiosity. In her profession, Lauren used her own surroundings to reflect her experiences and culture to help others broaden their viewpoints. She stated,

“they are conversation starters. They spur questions.” Lauren always encouraged students to study abroad because “it will be the most wonderful and rewarding experience of their life.” She created openings in conversation to inspire students to experience the different moments in their life.

Confetti had an experience that revealed the necessity of learning about multiple facets of a culture to have a deeper grasp of genuinely understanding it. She described an encounter during her interview where she briefly felt humiliated until she remembered the cultural customs. It was also a reminder of how she needed to train her mind when faced with uncomfortable situations. “I was blown away...but I thought I had better get a sense of humor or this was going to be a disaster of an experience.” That moment taught her to question and not rush to judgement which is advice she frequently gave and helped demonstrate when interacting with students. A student double dipped a chip while eating with their group at a conference and another student overreacted about it. Confetti took the chance to inquire more about why the student dipped twice revealing family style dinners are the norm where she is from in the Philippines. By asking questions to instigate conversations between students, Confetti was able to teach students to ‘ask why’ so they can better analyze and react to cultural moments they do not understand.

**Study Abroad.** All participants expressed studying abroad was one of the most impactful experiences of their lives. They added that their time abroad also caused significant effects that influenced and challenged their personality, beliefs, and practices. Through reflection, they learned more about themselves allowing realizations to be made to greater understand others. Ellen shared during her interview, “my study abroad

experiences taught me to be brave.” She continued, “I figured out that I need to explore and be continuously learning.” Study abroad also helped her define who she wanted to be in her career. “It helped me develop empathy with people,” Ellen explained. She also “learned how to see and evaluate life from different perspectives and teach students to do the same.” Her awareness of how study abroad added meaning to her role in educating students helped her adjust strategies to connect and develop students that have or have not experienced study abroad.

Lauren’s study abroad experience led her to advocate for and encourage her students to study abroad themselves. She believed in the importance of how study abroad developed students and could broaden their cultural understanding of others. “I always encourage all my students to student abroad because it opened my eyes to the way other people live, their cultures, their social norms, what is acceptable and what is not,” Lauren stressed. She had many students that were inspired to study abroad and she loved following up with them afterwards. She shared, “It is much more than just wanting to sight see, they want to immerse themselves...to have a more authentic experience.” Her goal was to be the encouragement she received when considering to study abroad for her students.

The amount of influence that study abroad had on Confetti’s career was a surprise to her. She gained and developed many skills, such as, patience, acceptance of unforeseeable factors and cultural differences, and a sincere curiosity. During her interview, she stated “I think because of the experiences I have had, that it has made me able to disassemble things quickly in a non-judgmental way.” Among her learned skills

was speaking another language, which she became more confident doing after practicing abroad. Confetti shared, “I learned to be more willing to be wrong and just make the effort.” She carried this knowledge and understanding with her when interacting with students, especially those from different cultures. Confetti’s study abroad experience, along with the other two participants, not only taught them skills and broadened their view points in their personal lives, but also had a significant impact on the skills and personality traits needed to make them successful in their careers.

**People.** Interacting with different types of people and the intimate cultural experiences that were provided to the participants was a main topic of discussion during the interviews. The knowledge that can be gained when simply talking to them was crucial for the participants’ deeper understanding of different cultures. Since their careers are based on serving students, the students become the people that they need to connect with and influence. Ellen’s study abroad experience completely changed her outlook about how to interact with other people. She strived to create safe spaces around her to help other people express themselves freely and not have to hide who they are. Ellen said, “we want to create a space that welcomes all students, but also one where they can ask questions and learn.” She also believed in creating opportunities for students to have relatable experience if study abroad was not an option for them. Ellen shared, “I feel it is my responsibility to help students find scholarships or even opportunities without leaving the city. There are tons of community organizations...students can participate in to expose them to various cultural events.” She always took the opening to



explain how interacting with different people could help them grow and develop as humans.

When Lauren transitioned into her new position at the university, she was told that she was the first Latin American to hold the position. Despite her surprise, she was more worried about potentially distancing herself from students. “After I started, students walked into my office and chatted me up just like before,” Lauren admitted. A familiar student confronted Lauren about her new position. She recalled the student saying, “I don’t think you realize it...I hope that people have been telling you that [this position] is a big deal and I am proud of you.” She knew receiving the position was significant in setting new standards for Latin American women, but did not realize how important her holding the position would be to the people around her. She decided then to work even harder to connect with people because her level of influence had increased. “I want to build more relationships with my...students that interact with this office. If I can share my experiences and connect with them...I can create opportunities for their programs to be more culturally inclusive,” Lauren expressed during interview.

When Confetti studied abroad she had to change her routine to better connect with the people in their own culture. It was custom for the people in the community where she was staying to have a large lunch and a small dinner. Lunch was a time for the people to come together and commune. Confetti was motivated by productivity during the day, but soon realized, “I was missing my opportunity to connect with the family...I had to rearrange my schedule to fit the Spanish schedule.” This allowed her to have a closer relationship with her host mother, who always showed patience with Confetti while she

learned the language and customs of the Spanish. Confetti modeled the same patience and understanding that her host mother showed to her when interacting with the international students. One of her international students would hug longer than is custom in America. Instead of feeling awkward, her mindset was “go ahead with your long hug, I am not going to worry about it. I think [understanding cultural differences] has made me better at helping to explain or to give my students the content and opportunity to show more grace.” For her, it was all about connecting with people by accepting their differences and she tried teaching her students the same.

**Culture.** The deepest part of the participants’ study abroad experiences was the immersion into the different cultures. Allowing themselves to be vulnerable and truly stepping out of their comfort zone to watch, listen, and learn about a lifestyle that is foreign to them made their study abroad experience richer in value. Each participant found the various cultures challenging to understand and adjust to at times, but the character traits and social skills they gained were priceless. Ellen shared in her interview, “I remember coming back and realizing that the hardest part was not going, but actually coming back. I had experienced this ‘thing’ that made me grow and change as a person that my friends had not done.” The experience of being in a new culture taught her to be brave, take chances, go on adventures, and talk to a room full of people she did not know. One of Ellen’s goals as a student affairs professional was to make sure students that could not study abroad still had opportunities to experience culturally diverse programs. When planning events, Ellen challenged her students to “think about their event and what it could imply” because she wants to train them to learn and develop intercultural

competence. She had students “critically think about how to incorporate different cultures and do it in a positive way.”

Lauren’s understanding and view of culture was impacted by, not only, her study abroad experience but also from her dual cultural background. She stated, “I bring that [understanding and view] into everything that I do and I think the students see that and respect it.” Lauren figured out that if she shared her experiences with her students, she could connect with them and create opportunities for learning about diversity and inclusivity. One of her popular practices was to encourage communication by sometimes pushing them together. “They need to be made uncomfortable and let them take off,” Lauren shared during her interview. She believed that students would connect with each other and become comfortable in new situations if they learned how to listen and communicate. By creating different situations, students were able to learn about their peers’ cultures and more about their own.

When Confetti was living in Spain, her favorite cultural events were the local celebrations. She felt, “we were doing something wrong in America.” The festivals lasted for days, each one different from the day before. She attended in wonderment taking every chance to learn something new about the culture she was experiencing. Confetti became more comfortable stepping outside of her comfort zone and came to understand how important that was to the process of gaining intercultural competence. She carried that same idea to her career. Working with Greek life, Confetti identified the need for more cross-organization education because of how different the groups of students were. The students joining cultural Greek organizations, such as chapters in

National Pan Hellenic Council & Multicultural Greek Council, were receiving a significantly higher level of exposure to diversity and inclusion than students joining Interfraternity Council and National Panhellenic Council organizations. Confetti shared in the interview, “I think students in IFC and NPC could benefit a lot from a multicultural perspective. She continuously worked to create opportunities for all Greek students to be educated about each other, such as officer retreats, mixers, and Black Greek 101 programs. Each participant experienced culture differently and each participant has a different views and practices pertaining to how to educate their students about culture. However, all the participants agreed on how important learning about and understanding different cultures was to their overall development as people and professions.

**Think differently.** The ability to think differently, and be open to the fact that everyone thinks differently from each other and respecting that, is critical to developing intercultural competence. The participants learned, through their study abroad experiences, to notice how cultures differ and that those differences were reflected in people’s actions. To Ellen, being vulnerable was the first step to learning more about how someone thinks by creating a safe space to share thoughts and feelings. “When I let my guard down and let others know that I am embarrassed about something, students see that I am uncomfortable but owning my feelings,” Ellen expressed in her interview. She saw that being vulnerable and open about herself allowed students to understand her better and feel safe sharing with her. The connection led to students being more open-minded and willing to communicate with people different from themselves. Ellen reminded students “when they grow up they will have to work with people from different

backgrounds. The more information they can gain as a student about how to effectively communicate, the better they will be able to work with a variety of people.” Ellen credited her study abroad experience to exposing her to situations where she had to trust herself enough to share personal things about herself with people completely different than her. She stated, “I think study abroad directly affected my ability to create relationships with students who look different from me or come from different backgrounds.”

When Lauren witnessed the cultures of Romania and France, she was in shock, but also in awe at the differences from the United States. “I think that it has made me more grateful for the opportunities that I have here,” she shared. While she felt many people dismissed how great America was, Lauren thought of America differently because of her cultural experiences abroad and from visiting her family in Mexico. Her multicultural view affected everything she did. She explained that she brings that knowledge and viewpoint, “into everything that I do and I think the students see that and respect it.” Like Ellen, she knew that sharing her experiences helped connect with the students and providing educational activities that had a greater impact. “Hopefully I can create opportunities for their programs to be more culturally inclusive,” she said. Her programs generally encouraged situations that challenged students’ points of view and educated them about different cultural norms and customs.

Study abroad provided a chance for Confetti to gain perspective and knowledge about different cultures allowing her to have more meaningful interactions with students. “For me, the lesson is that as a professional and as a person, it is about effort and trying

to do the right thing and trying to communicate across differences,” Confetti shared. She strived to take advantage of every moment to help students broaden their points, usually by instigating questions among them. In the leadership programs at the university that she oversees, she works to recruit and include a more diverse group of student leaders. Not only does she want the student populations appropriately represented, she knows from her experiences abroad that the more students are exposed to cultural differences, the more they will learn from each other and expand their views. Despite differing thought processes and beliefs about study abroad and education, each participant believed in the importance of educating their students about being open-minded to people that are different from them. Learning to think differently and understanding that everyone does allowed the participants to be more effective in creating situations for students to gain that knowledge.

### **Summary**

The narrative analysis of the non-fiction stories presented in this chapter represent three student affairs professionals that previously studied abroad. The participants shared their study abroad experiences, the realizations they made that assisted their development of intercultural competence, and how they applied those traits and skills to educating their students. Through the stories, popular themes emerged which were major components of the participants’ lives that affected their intercultural competence. The themes identified included experience, study abroad, people, culture, and think differently. The last chapter provides a summary of the study, discussion, conclusion, implications, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **Summary, Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a summary of the study including the purpose and significance followed by the conclusion which provides my analysis and evaluation of the findings. Following the conclusion, implications for practice and discussion of the findings is presented. Lastly, recommendations for future research and practice are given before closing remarks.

This study provided narrative stories from three student affairs professionals that previously studied abroad. The narratives reflected the participants' experiences while abroad including reflections of what they learned and how they developed intercultural competence. They went on to explain how their knowledge, experience, and point of view positively affected their career. The significance of this study was to understand how student affairs professionals use intercultural competence in their professional dispositions to prepare college students to live and become responsible citizens in a culturally diverse and global society.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this narrative non-fiction study was to understand how student affairs professionals grew and developed intercultural competence from the personal

study abroad experiences. In addition, the study sought to identify how student affairs professionals craft their strategies and practices based on their intercultural competence to impact student learning.

The stories in this study provided information about how significantly experiencing study abroad could affect a student affairs professional's career. The knowledge and skills gained while exploring other cultures assisted the participants to connect with diverse populations of students. Their re-encounters suggest how important their experiences were to educating and preparing them to be effective student affairs professionals. The following research questions guided the study and interview process:

1. How do student affairs' professionals perceive their study abroad experiences to have impacted their personal development of intercultural competence?
2. What perceptions do student affairs professionals have on how intercultural competence affects their workplace?
3. What strategies do student affairs professionals use to provide an environment that reflects their professional disposition?

The narrative analysis examined the restoried experiences of the three participants to identify themes in relation to the research questions. The student affairs professionals' study abroad experiences and other cultural encounters exposed them to develop skills and broaden their understanding to become more interculturally competent. The most common themes emerged from several readings and were coded through NVivo 11. The identified themes were: experience, study abroad, people, culture, and



think differently. These themes were all crucial factors in the student affairs professionals' ability to gain intercultural competence.

### **Conclusions**

**Perceptions of Study Abroad.** In this study, all three participants stated that their study abroad experience encouraged them to step outside of their comfort zone to explore a culture completely different from their own. The participants also shared that their way of life and points of view were challenged, forcing them to reflect on who they were as individuals and who they wanted to become. They learned to be courageous when taking chances, patient when communicating with others, and respectful of how others considered and lived in the world. The things they experienced that changed their point of view affected them enough to change their habits to assimilate to other cultures allowing them to gain a better understanding of different cultures. More importantly, experiencing cultural differences to gain intercultural competence helped them understand the processes and procedures of developing skills and knowledge to become more culturally aware (Lowe et al., 2014).

**Perceptions of Intercultural Competence.** The participants revealed during their interviews that their development of intercultural competence from their exposure and experiences abroad was something that changed them holistically in a way that would last a lifetime. They carried the intercultural competence they developed into every part of their life including their professional dispositions. Each participant shared that the study abroad experience changed their life, how they thought, how they communicated, how they viewed the world, and even helped them to develop personal

skills and characteristics (Lowe et al., 2014). The ability to think differently is what the participants considered among the first steps in initiating the process to develop intercultural competence.

The participants explained how their experiences and personal growth influenced how they thought and performed in their careers crafting their professional dispositions. They noted that they were open-minded, willing to be vulnerable with their students and colleagues, recognized their status and role in groups, and designed their practices based on gaining intercultural competence. All personal features they utilized in their careers in turn further educated their students (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Chessman, 2015). They credited how studying abroad helped them gain intercultural competence which affected their professional dispositions.

**Intercultural Competent Strategies.** Without human contact, the hope of gaining any kind of cultural understanding is decreased. Williams (2005) conducted a study showing interaction with people from other cultures improved cultural skills in order to communicate. The participants all mentioned about influence meeting and talking with people throughout their experiences was key to their understanding of different cultures. While not every experience was positive, every interaction provided insight into the culture where the participants could learn something (Terzuolo, 2016). Learning the life lesson of always taking advantage of a situation to learn something was something each participant stated they strived to encourage their students to do.

They knew if they could instigate conversation, create programs to challenge students' minds, and provide safe environments for students to share, students would

have a greater opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge to become more culturally competent (Ghosh, 2013). All the participants made the realization that they could use their study abroad experiences to establish relationships and connections with students from a variety of backgrounds. In turn, teaching those students how to do the same.

The last conclusion I want to present is the connection between the participants' intercultural competence gained from studying abroad and used to educate students about diversity, inclusion, and cultural awareness, including the information provided in the CAS General Standard: Diversity, Equity, and Access. From the interviews, it was evident how the student affairs professionals' programs and services met the Diversity, Equity, and Access CAS General Standard. A few of the met criteria were: (1) advocate for sensitivity to multicultural and social justice concerns; (2) establish goals for diversity, equity, and access; (3) foster communication and practices that enhance understanding of identity, culture, self-expression, and heritage; (4) promote respect for commonalities and differences among people within their historical and cultural contexts; (5) address the characteristics and needs of diverse constituents when establishing and implementing culturally relevant and inclusive programs, services, policies, procedures, and practices (CAS, 2015). Study abroad was instrumental in the student affairs professionals' ability to provide such programs and services to meet multiple CAS Standards and keep moving forward in the educational efforts of students.

### **Implications for Practice**

Implications for this study are based on evidence from the three participants' stories and the narrative analysis that followed. This study revealed the positive effects

of student study abroad and how it can affect students later in life as they become functioning citizens in a diverse society. All participants provided evidence of their development of intercultural competence, whether through their ability to connect with a diverse student population, instigate conversation between a variety of students, or their ability to consider various points of view. The student affairs professionals learned skills and developed traits that assisted in their ability to educate students. Such skills and traits included teaching students to have conversations to explain their cultural background and habits, expanding the students' thought processes, and providing safe environments where students feel included and free to be themselves. Each student affairs professional mentioned being able to adjust their point of view, the development of patience when communicating, having courage to try new things, and putting themselves in uncomfortable situations. When working with student groups, the participants had to model what they expected from their students, including being vulnerable and sharing personal realizations and using appropriate language. The exposure to such situations during study abroad is what the participants credited to initiate their learning.

Another implication for practice is that study abroad as a developer of intercultural competence provides student affairs professionals a greater ability to connect and relate to diverse student populations allowing them to be more effective in their career. Thus, supporting the need for future and current student affairs professionals to immerse themselves in cultural situations and trainings to increase their understanding of others' differences. In order to educate students, especially those that cannot experience study abroad for themselves, student affairs professionals need to have a base context of

how to provide learning environments to assist students to become interculturally competent.

This study may provide guidelines for student affairs professionals to use intercultural competence to create safe spaces for students to learn. The data also offers support for students to experience study abroad, especially students interested in pursuing a career in student affairs because of the cultural gains the experience can provide to help individuals have a deeper understanding of how to interact and communicate with those different from themselves.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The narrative analysis of the non-fiction stories presented in chapter VII described the main factors of the three student affairs professionals' experiences of study abroad, their development of intercultural competence, and how they applied what they learned to their career. The most common themes discussed from the narrative analysis are: experience, study abroad, people, culture, and think differently. These themes signify the most impactful pieces of their experiences that led to their development of intercultural competence. All the participants acknowledged having individual experiences that influenced their points of view and understanding. Each experience having its own affect in changing the participant based on their previous experiences and how they processed the information. The participants also expressed how the total experience of studying abroad was a life changing event that ignited their passion to help others learn and experience what they had.

Being engulfed in a culture different from their own, every personal encounter was an opportunity to learn. The participants learned to communicate with and therefore understand the different people they were interacting with. This ability to connect with a variety of people directly affected their career by making them better at relating to the diverse students on their campuses. The participants all shared that they felt they were more respected by their students for their honesty, openness, and encouraged communication during everyday situations and were more willing to model the same actions as their advisers.

For the participants, understanding their own culture was part of the equation to understanding someone else's culture. As the participants traveled abroad and were faced with cultures different from their own, they were forced to access and reflect on their own culture. Realizing how they thought and why they acted a certain way allowed the participants to recognize patterns in how people from different cultures thought and acted. The better the participant became at identifying patterns and understanding where people from different cultures came from, the more culturally competent they became. Applying those skills and understanding to student affairs, the professionals taught students to identify differences and work to understand why those differences exist. They all encouraged their students to take time to truly understand and respect people and the culture they were a part of.

The last of the most common themes identified was to think differently. To the participants thinking differently first reflected their broadened points of view gained while studying abroad. That experience for each of them opened a door to possibility, of

understanding the world was too large to know everything. In any opportunity to understand a different culture and to become interculturally competent, the participants believed learning to think differently was the foundation to that achievement. To help their students become interculturally competent, the student affairs professionals understood that challenging students to think differently was part of the foundation needed to build upon. The participants set the example by inspiring students to ask questions, have patience while trying to understand, and give respect to those that may have differing views about life.

The findings revealed that while all three participants reached an understanding of intercultural competence and displayed the ability to provide environments that encouraged student learning, the path on which they traveled to reach that level varied. One participant studied abroad twice in two different countries, another studied in a country she had previously traveled to, and the third studied abroad but was also influenced by her dual cultural background. In addition, the skills they gained and the growth they sustained led them to the same want to change students' lives by teaching them to understand and respect cultural differences, but again, how they learned varied between the three participants. Each one had different experiences that led to personal realizations about themselves allowing them to develop at their own pace based on the individual situations they lived through.

Lastly, how they applied what they learned ranged wide in their practices and strategies because they were constructed by personal preferences, responsibilities of the position they worked in and the types of connections they made with their students. The

study affirmed my assumptions, specifically the similarity of the participants' study abroad experiences to my own. I believe I came to reach my disposition of intercultural competence because of the situations and encounters specific to my study abroad and career experiences.

There were a handful of differences between the participants' interviews and their development of intercultural competence. Ellen's study abroad experiences were highly influential on her and she changed rapidly based on those experiences. Where Lauren's development of intercultural competence was a combination of her biracial heritage and her study abroad experiences. She shared in her interview that while she did have a Hispanic heritage and had traveled back and forth to Mexico to visit family, it was not until her study abroad experience that she connected the impact of cultural experiences on her personal life. Confetti's growth evolved differently, happening over a longer period and in a more independent state of mind.

The participants also differed on how they implemented their intercultural competence through their professional dispositions in their careers. Ellen used her personality traits that had been affected by gaining intercultural competence as a tool to connect with students and provide them with safe environments to be express themselves. She also adjusted the expectations of herself, her staff, and the students she interacted with to reflect interculturally competent views. At first sight, Lauren's professional disposition that included intercultural competence was noticeable by the decorations in her office that reflected her heritage and experiences abroad. She believed in intermixing students from various backgrounds to help them learn more about each other causing



them to become comfortable in different situations. Confetti's personality had a stronger effect on how she demonstrated her professional disposition. She openly challenged the way students and other staff members approached situations, including their thought processes and interactions with others.

An interesting pattern I recognized after reviewing the similarities and differences of the experiences of all three participants was how their study abroad experience was the starting point for their overall change or evolution. They each embraced the experience differently based on their personalities and continued to change influenced by their personal internal and external factors. Their career practices also reflected their individual characteristics and skills. Despite their differences of personality and style, each participant continued to travel to learn about new cultures after their first experience abroad.

### **Recommendations**

Utilizing study abroad as a cultural education program during a student's undergraduate experience may provide for increased interactions and understanding of cultural differences depending on the experience. In addition, study abroad trips in higher education and student affairs graduate programs could further prepare student affairs professionals to create and implement initiatives that reflected intercultural experiences for students to learn. Providing opportunities for student to develop intercultural competence through university and local programming, student affairs professionals can help educate all students, whether they can travel abroad or not.

Student affairs professionals should take advantage of study abroad opportunities or any other cultural trainings to continue to develop their skills and understanding of working with diverse groups of people. Applying the skills learned from interacting with different types of people, student affairs professionals may have a greater chance of connecting with students by providing a safe space for them to share about themselves which can lead to greater understanding between different cultures. In turn, the student's point of view could be challenged requiring them to reflect on their beliefs and actions in comparison to other individuals.

This study only used three participants due to time needed for the in-depth interview process used. Future research would benefit with a higher number of participants to increase the amount of evidence used to determine the impact of study abroad experiences on student affairs professionals and their ability to provide the needed knowledge and skills to create environments for student learning. Further research could also include a more diverse selection of participants based on gender, ethnicity, geographical location, type and size of university, and position held, among other differing factors.

Comparing the impact students felt when working with student affairs professionals that did study abroad versus those that did not experience study abroad could influence future research. Also, the consideration of the different types of study abroad programs and the amount of culturally rich programs provided could affect how deeply they were impacted during their experience. Finally, further research could also compare the students' development of intercultural competence with the combination of

personal study abroad experiences and cultural programming from student affairs professionals that have also studied abroad with students and student affairs professionals that have not studied abroad.

### **Closing Remarks**

This narrative nonfiction qualitative study focused on three student affairs professionals and explored their experiences during study abroad, how they developed intercultural competence, and how they applied what they had learned to their careers in high education to create environments for student learning. As the researcher and a student affairs professional that previous studied abroad, this study affirmed my personal and professional beliefs on the importance of study abroad as a personal growth tool and professional training tool for future application.

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## **APPENDIX A**

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
(IRB-H)

**Please provide one original to:**

DR. PAULINE SAMPSON, IRB CHAIR  
PO Box 13018  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962

Date: August 29, 2016

**1. Faculty Researcher/Sponsor/Thesis or Dissertation Chair**

Pauline Sampson	Secondary Ed/Ed Leadership	13018	936- 468- 1274	936- 468- 5496	sampsonp@sfasu.edu
Printed Name(s)	Department	Campus Box	Phone	Fax	E-mail

**2. Student Researcher (if applicable) *Note: IRB feedback will be sent to faculty sponsor and student by e-mail.***

Dare Chronister	Athletics	13010	580- 490- 1758	936- 468- 7079	ldchronister@gmail.com
Printed Name(s)	Department	Campus Box	Phone	Fax	E-mail

1100 Ferguson Nacogdoches, TX 75961

Off-campus address (if appropriate)

**3a. Type of Research:  
applicable):**

☐ Class Project (List Class): \_\_\_\_\_  
☒ No If yes, specify

☐ Thesis

☒ Dissertation  
Human Subjects?

**3b. Funding for Research (if**

Grant-funded? ☐ Yes

funding source \_\_\_\_\_

**3c. Completed CITI training on**

<https://www.citiprogram.org/>

☐ Faculty Research

☐ No ☒ Yes Dates(s)

Completed: 02/08/2015

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Title of Project: The Impact of Study Abroad on Intercultural Competence as a professional disposition: Narratives Stories from Student Affairs Professionals

5. Is this project a renewal or one that has previously been considered by the IRB?

YES ☐ or NO ☒

Approximate dates of previous request: If the project had prior review by another IRB, attach a copy of approval and related correspondence. (Omit if not relevant)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. State the projected time period of the project. IRB approval is for a one-year period.

A continuing project

should reapply. Time period: August 2016 – August 2017

7. Informed consent. Describe the consent process and attach consent forms/documents. The goal is to communicate clearly with the participants in simple, non-technical language.

Please see attached letter of informed consent. Interviews will be the primary research collection technique. Upon initial contact by email or phone call, the individuals will be invited to participate and the researcher will obtain a signed consent form from each participant.

8. You must include copies of all other pertinent information, such as a copy of the questionnaires you will use or other survey instruments, letters of approval from cooperating institutions, etc.

Please see attached questionnaire

9. Provide a research protocol following these steps:

A. Describe the target population(s) and the selection criteria. What is the anticipated demographic profile: age, number, gender, ethnicity, etc.? Describe the method of contact and recruitment. (Recruiting practices for children must be explained.) You must clearly include the anticipated number of participants.

The anticipated demographic is 25-40 years of age, 3 participants from different sizes and types of universities from various geographical locations, and possibility of various genders and ethnicities. Student affairs professionals who have volunteered for the National Association of Campus Activities will be contacted via email and/or phone to participate in a narrative non-fiction inquiry.

- B. Identify the specific sites/agencies to be used as well as approval status.  
 Include copies of approval letters from agencies to be used.  
Sites will be dependent on participants, but will most likely be participants' universities. Approval has not been requested from any site at this time.
- C. Briefly describe the proposed research; include major research hypotheses or questions and the research design.  
Research will be conducted using narrative non-fiction story method in order to explore the perspectives of three student affairs professionals. This study will focus on the impact of study abroad experiences of student affairs professionals on their intercultural competence and tolerance. Furthermore, the study will explore their ability to create environments that foster cultural awareness and inclusiveness for student learning.
- D. Discuss the potential risks – physical, psychological, legal, or other – in relation to the anticipated benefits to the subjects and to society.  
There are no anticipated risks associated with the study. The research study will use pseudonyms for all interviewees in reference to their names and universities in the reporting research. Participants will have the opportunity to construct their own pseudonyms.
- E. Discuss how confidentiality of the data or the participant's identity will be maintained. Where will informed consent statements or other identifying information be stored?  
All consent forms and materials gathered will be maintained by the researcher in locked filing cabinets that only the researcher has access to. Interview recordings and interview transcriptions will be protected by a password on the researcher's computer. When not in use, the computer will be locked by password. Consent forms will also be locked within the filing cabinet.
- F. Briefly describe any compensation or reimbursement that will be provided to subjects for their participation.  
No compensation or reimbursement will be provided to subjects for their participation. Participation will be based solely on voluntary basis.

Additions or changes in procedures involving human subjects, as well as any problems connected with the use of human subjects once the project has begun, must be brought to the attention of the IRB for human subjects.

#### 10. Signatures:

- A. Approval by faculty sponsor/thesis or dissertation chair (required of all students):



I affirm the accuracy of this application, and accept the responsibility for the implementation and conduct of this research, supervision of the human subjects, the monitoring and maintenance of confidential data.

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Principal Investigator(s) Date

---

Faculty Sponsor Date

B. Acknowledged by Department Chair (or Dean, if Chair is PI or faculty sponsor):

---

Department Chair (or Dean, as applicable) Date

### **Informed Consent Checklist**

- \_\_\_\_\_ A statement that the study involves research
- \_\_\_\_\_ An explanation of the purposes of the research
- \_\_\_\_\_ The expected duration of the subject's participation
- \_\_\_\_\_ A description of the procedures to be followed
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identification of any procedures which are experimental
- \_\_\_\_\_ A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks of discomforts to the subject
- \_\_\_\_\_ A description of any benefits to the subject or to others which may reasonably be expected from the research
- \_\_\_\_\_ A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to the subject
- \_\_\_\_\_ A statement describing the extent, if any, to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained
- \_\_\_\_\_ For research involving more than minimal risk, an explanation as to whether any compensation, and an explanation as to whether any medical treatments are available if injury occurs and, if so, what they consist of, or where further information may be obtained
- \_\_\_\_\_ An explanation of whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights, including faculty sponsor's name and contact information if the investigator is a student
- \_\_\_\_\_ A statement that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled
- \_\_\_\_\_ A statement that the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative will receive a copy of the informed consent statement

**Informed Consent Form****for****THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A  
PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITION: NARRATIVE STORIES FROM STUDENT  
AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS**

I consent to participate in the study by meeting with the researcher in interview sessions. I understand that all responses, names, and any identifying comments will remain confidential using a coding system, and the purpose of the study is to further the research on the impact of study abroad on student affairs professionals' intercultural competence in their careers. I also consent to having the interview session's audio recorded for transcription purposes. I am available for the following dates/times for participant in an interview.

Date and Time Available for Interview

Position/Number of Years in Position

Participant

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

### **Interview Protocol**

**The following set of questions will be used to guide the three separate interviews for each participant.**

#### **Level One Questions:**

- Explain your experiences during your study abroad including where you went, who you met, what you did, and what events impacted you the most.
- How do you feel you have grown from your experiences, in terms of intercultural competence? Give specific examples, if possible.
- How has your study abroad experience affected your approach to your work in your career as a student affairs professional?
- How have your experiences impacted your ability to provide environments that foster cultural awareness and inclusiveness for student learning?

#### **Level Two Questions:**

- How did your experiences abroad affect you on a personal level? How did your perspectives broaden?
- How has the development in your career supported or hindered what you have learned or how your perspectives have broadened during your time abroad?
- What practices or strategies have been impacted by what you learned or how you changed during your study abroad experience? Specially, in the direction of student learning?

#### **Level Three Questions:**

- Can you provide specific examples of how your experiences abroad have impacted your career and student learning?
- What do you wish you could still change or implement if given the freedom?
- Overall, how important do you think your study abroad experience has affected who you are and who you are in your career?

### Letter to Prospective Participant

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. In my previous academic work as an undergraduate and graduate, doctoral studies at SFASU and through my professional experience as a student affairs professional, I have taken an interest in the impact of study abroad experiences on professionals' intercultural competence demonstrated in their careers. This letter serves as a formal invitation to take part in a qualitative research study about your experiences from studying abroad and how they have affected your career in providing environments that foster cultural awareness and inclusiveness for student learning. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you serve as a student affairs professional that has previously studied abroad.

Your participation in this research study will involve an interview, conducted in a mutually convenient location on or around your campus. Interviews will be digitally recorded. The questions will be open ended in nature. Confidentiality of responses will be respected at all times. To ensure accuracy, all transcripts of the individual interviews will be sent back to the participant to verify validity.

For the purposes of this study, only the researcher will have access to the data, which will be stored under lock and key in the researcher's home and will be maintained for three years. The participants will be identified in the final product by an alias to ensure confidentiality. To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

If you choose to participate, please sign and send in the attached Informed Consent waiver. If you need clarification or have questions regarding the study, please feel free to call me at (580) 490-1758 or unknown, professor and research advisor at 936-468-xxxx.

Any concerns with this research may be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936-468-6606.

Sincerely,

Dare Chronister, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Secondary Education  
and Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
Stephen F. Austin State University

Pauline Sampson  
Chair, Dissertation Committee  
Department of Secondary Education  
and Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
Stephen F. Austin State University

P.O. Box 13018  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962  
580-490-1758

P.O. Box 13018  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962  
936-468-5496

## **APPENDIX B**

**Informed Consent Form****for****THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A  
PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITION: NARRATIVE STORIES FROM STUDENT  
AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS**

I consent to participate in the study by meeting with the researcher in interview sessions. I understand that all responses, names, and any identifying comments will remain confidential through the use of a coding system, and the purpose of the study is to further the research on caring behaviors in higher education mentoring relationships between student affairs mentors and student leaders. I also consent to having the interview session's audio recorded for transcription purposes. I am available for the following dates/times for participant in an interview.

**Date and Time Available for Interview****Classification/Current Positions****Participant****Date****Person Obtaining Consent****Date**



## **APPENDIX C**

### Letter to Prospective Participant

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. In my previous academic work as an undergraduate and graduate, doctoral studies at SFASU and through my professional experience as a student affairs professional, I have taken an interest in the impact of study abroad experiences on professionals' intercultural competence demonstrated in their careers. This letter serves as a formal invitation to take part in a qualitative research study about your experiences from studying abroad and how they have affected your career in providing environments that foster cultural awareness and inclusiveness for student learning. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you serve as a student affairs professional that has previously studied abroad.

Your participation in this research study will involve an interview, conducted in a mutually convenient location on or around your campus. Interviews will be digitally recorded. The questions will be open ended in nature. Confidentiality of responses will be respected at all times. To ensure accuracy, all transcripts of the individual interviews will be sent back to the participant to verify validity.

For the purposes of this study, only the researcher will have access to the data, which will be stored under lock and key in the researcher's home and will be maintained for three years. The participants will be identified in the final product by an alias to ensure confidentiality. To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

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Sincerely,

Dare Chronister, M.Ed.  
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## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Protocol**

**The following set of questions will be used to guide the three separate interviews for each participant.**

#### **Level One Questions:**

- Explain your experiences during your study abroad including where you went, who you met, what you did, and what events impacted you the most.
- How do you feel you have grown from your experiences, in terms of intercultural competence? Give specific examples, if possible.
- How has your study abroad experience affected your approach to your work in your career as a student affairs professional?
- How have your experiences impacted your ability to provide environments that foster cultural awareness and inclusiveness for student learning?

#### **Level Two Questions:**

- How did your experiences abroad affect you on a personal level? How did your perspectives broaden?
- How has the development in your career supported or hindered what you have learned or how your perspectives have broadened during your time abroad?
- What practices or strategies have been impacted by what you learned or how you changed during your study abroad experience? Specially, in the direction of student learning?

#### **Level Three Questions:**

- Can you provide specific examples of how your experiences abroad have impacted your career and student learning?
- What do you wish you could still change or implement if given the freedom?
- Overall, how important do you think your study abroad experience has affected who you are and who you are in your career?

## VITA

Dare Chronister graduated from Dickson High school in 2005. She attended Lindenwood University before transferring to East Central University, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology - Exercise Science in 2010. She began working in higher education, focusing in student affairs in 2008, then continuing her education to earn a Master of Education degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs from the University of Arkansas in 2012. She became a director of campus life/dean of students at Connors State College in 2013. In 2014, she started as the assistant director of Greek life at Stephen F. Austin State University and was accepted into the 2015 Doctoral Cohort, where she earned a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership in 2017. Currently, she serves as an athletic academic adviser for SFA athletics.

Permanent Address: 1100 Ferguson  
Nacogdoches, TX 75965

Style manual designation: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition*

Typist: Dare Chronister  
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