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## **Study Abroad and College Students of the African Diaspora: Attitudes, Access and Barriers**

**Abstract.** This qualitative study examined the attitudes, preferences, and barriers to participation experienced by African American students attempting to participate in study abroad programs. A literature review indicates that African American students are grossly underrepresented in global education opportunities when compared with their overall enrollment numbers. Study abroad has been named as a valuable (both personally and academically) enriching experience granting competitive edges in postgraduate and professional endeavors in a globalized world. Twenty participants from purposively selected universities across the United States participated in a short-answer survey of either twelve or seven questions, depending on if they participated in a study abroad program or not. The results suggest that finances, institutional factors, and individual differences are significant factors in determining if an African American student will study abroad. Future studies tracking Black students' active intent to study

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abroad, as well as those that do study abroad, can provide more insight to universities as they attempt to increase this group of students' participations.

**Keywords:** Study abroad, participation, African American students

## **Introduction/Literature Review**

Though the phrase “study abroad” is modern in that it speaks to the spread of globalized education as a central tenant of contemporary higher education, the practice is decades old. In the United States following WWI, study abroad began as “junior year abroad” with faculty led tours from universities on the Eastern Seaboard. It was available only to the select individuals with the resources to participate (Giedt, Gokcek, & Ghosh, 2015). Following the Cold War, colleges and universities used grants and government funds to further internationalize their undergraduate curriculum with programs utilizing the creation of language emersion courses, creation of international studies majors and minors, and gradually expanding the scope of globalization in American education until it resembled the programs we witness today on college campuses (Giedt, Gokcek, & Ghosh, 2015).

The benefits of Study Abroad programs in American institutions of higher education have been the subject of much interest to educational scholars across disciplines throughout the latter 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In 1984, Gregory Armstrong surveyed 180 undergraduates to determine how the cross-cultural immersion, intensive language study experience the students had taken in high school, was perceived by students after they'd completed high school and entered college. Armstrong also wanted to glean information regarding the effects of participation on choice of study, choice of career, persistence in language study, additional foreign travel, and study opportunities (Armstrong, 1984). The results indicated increased intercultural sensitivity, a greater desire to further travel abroad, a greater desire to continue to pursue language studies, and a strong influence on career selection. Fifty-six per cent of respondents indicated they believed that their participation in the program effected their career choices directly (Armstrong, 1984). To add further credence to the influence of international education experiences on career selection, studies by Norris & Gillespie (2008), Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, and Jon (2009), and Potts (2015) concluded participants were more likely to be interested in and pursue internationally oriented careers.

Studies have concluded that students studying abroad were, generally: showing increased levels of concern about global events and cross-cultural interests and more aware of varied national and cultural perspectives (Carlson & Widaman, 1998; Chieffo, & Griffiths, 2004; Kowarski, 2010, Potts, 2015; Dwyer & Peters, 2004). They learned how to skillfully perform tasks related to international travel (Chieffo

& Griffiths, 2004). Demonstrating increased graduate school enrollment, civic involvement, social entrepreneurship was an outcome (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009). They engaged more frequently in academic publishing pursuits and academic cooperation across disciplines (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009; Xiaoxuan, 2004) as well as demonstrating higher levels of creative thinking (Lee, Therriault, & Linderholm, 2012). Such findings hold true regardless of the length of the program, with full-year students being more likely than short term students report gaining the benefits (Kadmar & Lewis, 2015; Slotkin, Durie, & Eisenber, 2012; Smith & Mitry, 2008; Dwyer, 2004).

From what appears to be all of the well-understood and examined benefits of study abroad, it could be assumed that global experiences would become a normal pursuit of interest for American college and university students. However, current estimates paint a different picture. Recent numbers from the Association of International Educators indicate that 325,339 students participated in for-credit study abroad programs in the 2015-2016 academic year, or a little over 1.6% of all matriculating US students (Educators, 2018). If these numbers seem to be on the slight side, it is because they are. With all the well-known benefits of study abroad there has been a push in higher education to further promote global education opportunities (Engberg, 2013). This has been done for good reason, as data from various resources indicate that American students are not as global minded as their peers in foreign institutions when it comes to international education (Barbuto Jr., Beenen, & Tran, 2015).

Over the last twenty years, there has been a significant increase in interest amongst researchers and institutions regarding student decisions on study abroad. Much of the literature delves into predictive factors that may provide insight into reasons why some students elect to participate in various study abroad programs, as opposed to others. One such study by Goldstein and Kim (2006) examined variables that predict participation in study abroad programs in undergraduate students. The study concluded that students with more positive expectations for study abroad were more likely to go than those that had fewer positive expectations. Similarly, students that indicated a higher level of interest in linguistic competency were more likely to participate in a program. Students that scored higher on measures of ethnocentrism were less likely to study abroad (Goldstein & Kim, 2006). Such results suggest that individual differences and factors are a significant determinant to students studying abroad.

A quantitative study by Luo and Jamieson-Drake in 2015 went on to delve a little more extensively into this issue—this time examining the role intent to study abroad upon entry into college plays on future participation in a program. A survey battery administered to three different incoming freshmen cohorts yielded several interesting results that have been—previously and after—suggested and corroborated by other studies: students having prior intent to study abroad before they began their

university tenure increased the probability that they would. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference in results when demographic information such as race, gender, and major field of study were taken into account (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015).

Similarly, a qualitative study by Lewis in 2016 examined the socio-cultural and personal factors influencing students' decisions regarding study abroad. The results indicated that cultural factors were much more important for students than social factors, along with tutorials/lectures being offered in English, even if English isn't the primary language spoken (Lewis, 2016). These studies were also careful to highlight the fact that students were aware of study abroad opportunities on their campus, though they all indicated that finances, to some extent, did play an influencing role on their ultimate decision (Lewis, 2016).

What the studies confirmed is that not only are a plethora of individual and socio-economic factors that govern student participation in study abroad, demographics and even institutional level factors are also strong determinants. Females are more likely than males to participate in global learning programs (Gieser, 2015), Caucasian/White are more likely than any other group to participate and account for the majority of American study abroad participants (Slotkin, Vamosi, & Perez, 2016). Students with certain majors (and course expectations) are less likely to participate than others, and minorities that have a positive relation between family finances and study abroad may be kept out of participating altogether (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). Individual attitudes are positively related to the intent to participate; concerns about degree completion time, career development prospects, and "subjective norms" derived from family and personal social networks also influence intent to study abroad. (Wang, Gault, Christ, & Diggin, 2016).

What these studies seem to indicate is that reasons students opt into and opt out of study abroad are far more dynamic and multi-faceted than simple economics, as had been largely suggested by pre-21<sup>st</sup> century research. Additionally, previous research clearly indicates that the numerous factors impact students from different demographics to varying degrees and this is becoming a more prominent focus of study.

While there is certainly more to be explored regarding the decision to undertake international educational experiences, the multiple studies amongst universities' moving forward with diversity initiatives are most concerned with the near absence of minority students from study abroad programs. Figures from NAFSA in the 2015-2016 academic year notes that of the 325,339 students in for credit study abroad programs, around 29% of students (or 94,348) studying abroad were "minority students": 5.9% African American, 8.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 9.7% Hispanic/Latino, 3.9% Multiracial, or 0.5% American Indian (Educators, 2018). With total enrollment figures in higher education that year reaching nearly 20 million, the total number of American students participating in global education programs, less than 2%

(Educators, 2018), demonstrates that the lack of participation in such programs is an “American issue”. Furthermore, there is a clear disparity in participation between Caucasian/White students and students of color when compared with their respective total enrollment rates.

An increase in studies that examine minority student participation in study abroad programs is relatively new. In 2010, Brux and Fry examined representatives from several minority student organizations on the University of Wisconsin, River Falls’ campus using a focus group/survey format. While only 5% of students enrolled in the institution during the time the study was conducted identified as “multicultural”, Brux and Fry were still able to draw Asian American, African American, Latinos, and Native Americans into the study (Brux & Fry, 2010). Asian students—the largest multicultural demographic—mentioned that familial requirements, program requirements for their majors, and academic scheduling were the secondary pressing concerns, after finances.

Similar concerns were expressed by the Latino students and Black students, citing apprehension about financing a program, racism, representation, language barriers, scheduling, and food concerns. Though both groups were positive about the idea of going, only the Latino students indicated definite intent to participate in a program in the future (Brux & Fry, 2010). Additionally, Black students indicated that they may not know much about the study abroad programs offered by their institution, though they did have at least one instructor or educational professional that they interacted with regularly who encouraged them to investigate a program. These persons were either a person of color or involved in study abroad themselves, and sometimes both (Brux & Fry, 2010). Ultimately, the study concluded that lack of in-depth awareness, a lack of encouragement, and other constraints contribute to preventing multicultural students from studying abroad.

A meta review by M’Balía in 2013 reiterated that multiple issues may be even more important for students of color than even finances—contrary to the frequent dialogue on the subject in the literature. M’Balía notes that finances are not just a concern for minority students, the literature frequently only focuses on students that do not/ have not studied abroad as opposed to those that do/have, and certain groups like African Americans have a unique relationship with travel due to historical precedents (M’Balía, 2013). M’Balía notes—not much of the literature focuses on students that have completed or are completing a study abroad program, and fewer still examine only students of color, with specific focus on African American students being almost non-existent, save for a few articles.

Two studies are of consequence on the topic of African Americans and study abroad, as they survey African American students that had completed or were in the process of completing a program at the time the research was conducted. First, in 2015, (Lu, Reddick, Dean, & Pecero) used focus groups and interviews to determine how capital and community wealth influenced students study abroad

choices and their experiences while they were abroad with 24 (12 male and 12 female) Black college students participating in a 4-week, faculty-led study abroad program in Beijing, China (Lu et al). The study yielded several interesting findings: the experience made the students feel more academically curious and globally competitive; lack of familial support, fear of the unknown, and anxiety over racism in foreign countries were strong determining factors. Black students can and will study abroad under certain conditions, such as having a trusted and relatable faculty that have already participated in such an experience (Lu et.al. 2015). These results only seemed to confirm theories about minority students potentially responding positively to targeting study abroad opportunities.

A similar semi-structured interview study was conducted by Lee and Green in 2016, this time on a group of 4 African American students' part of the Research in New South Africa study abroad trip. The responses emphasized what the students viewed as the significant importance of studying abroad. Students reported a greater sense of what their academic interests and long-term goals were, as well as an increased sense of racial identity. As the students either taught at an international institution or worked as a research assistant while in South Africa, they also reported a better understanding of how to conduct academic research (Lee & Green, 2016). This suggests that minority students, and Black students particularly, are generally just as keen to participate in global education programs as their White counterparts but may not feel that the programs offered or routinely advertised are geared toward them, nor do they appear to take into consideration the unique concerns of minority and Black students that are interested in such programs.

### **Purpose**

The focus of the current study is to examine the attitudes, influences, and barriers to access as experienced by African American students seeking to participate in study abroad programs. Study Abroad has been shown to improve the overall satisfaction of the collegiate experience for students, and it is now considered a customary first step toward joining the global community for many young people in the rapidly forming global community. The exception is the majority of Black American students. The research was developed around questions that address not only the attitudes and concerns Black students have regarding Study Abroad, but also how they perceive their ability to access these programs, and how much these issues influence their participation in university study abroad programs.

The current research involved completing face to face, telephone interviews, as well as self-completed online surveys with twenty voluntary participants. The participants attend various universities such as Christian affiliated, Historically

Black Universities, private and public universities. across the United States. The sample included undergraduate and graduate students.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

The study was conducted as part of a research capstone course at a large, urban university in Southeast Texas. The demographic (Black undergraduates and graduates completing a degree program at an accredited institution) was chosen due to the dearth of information on why this population did not appear (from literature reviews) to participate in study abroad programs in equal proportion to their attendance at tertiary institutions. The researcher utilized a combination of convenience sampling and word-of-mouth recruitment via personal connections. 20 students elected to participate in the survey. 8 students were drawn from various universities in the United States by referrals from other participants. The universities represented ranged in size with small to large student bodies. All campuses were in large urban cities. The remaining 12 participants were recruited via public advertisements placed on campuses at a small, private, top tier ranked university, and a small Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in a large, metropolitan city in Southeast Texas.

7 of the participants were male and 13 were female. The students were drawn from a variety of majors, though they were, predominantly, from fields in the social sciences and liberal arts (11 subjects). The participants ranged in age from 18-years old to 38-years-old, and were classified from freshman to Postgraduate.

### *Methods*

The researcher developed two structured short-answer interview surveys which were meant to explore the reasons why African American students may opt out of study abroad programs, or why they decided to go through with one. The questions probed: students' knowledge of study abroad programs offered on their respective campus; why they felt a study abroad program may be impactful (or why not); any academic, financial, or interpersonal influences on their decisions regarding study abroad; and any other factors that might contribute to their decision to participate in or not participate in study abroad programs. The students were encouraged to elaborate freely in answering each question in effort to provide as much pertinent information as possible.

### *Trustworthiness and Limitations*

The interview surveys were transcribed into field notes and reviewed by the researcher's supervisor to ensure integrity of the study; the researcher also

constructed the survey instrument with the guidance of her supervisor to ensure the validity of the questions within the instrument. Limitations of the study include short length of the survey instruments; instruments containing more items would have served to garner more information for even clearer results.

### *Analysis*

After transcribing the interview surveys into field notes, the notes were then further transcribed into audit trails that revealed critical factors, which were grouped and analyzed thematically. The researcher also examined the global education or study abroad pages of the universities from which the participants were drawn to provide additional insight into the students' knowledge about what programs are offered, how they function (type), and ways they are financed. These results were interpreted in an audit trail to clearly define those themes.

### *Findings*

#### **Positive Thoughts, Intent, and Participation**

All participants indicated they had previously thought about study abroad—some as early as high school—and had, overall, positive ideas about its merit to them should they participate. In keeping with previous findings in the literature, all of the students cited the value of expanding their cultural and global competencies as a great attraction to the idea of study abroad programs. They did, however, having differing views on how global education opportunities and programs had the capacity to shape their higher education experience and enhance their future career prospects.

One young woman we shall call Elizabeth stated that she believes it is important to be able to experience how different people communicate and function. She also noted that the experience would be of particular importance to her since she is a Communications major intending to go into crisis management/corporate/global communications as a career. It should be noted that Elizabeth is the younger sister to the researcher, who has both studied abroad and completed a degree program abroad, and so she (Elizabeth) has always been exposed to a strong influence that has shaped her interest in studying abroad herself.

There are two other students that directly mentioned utilizing study abroad as a way to fulfill academic requirements of their degree programs, while being able to immerse themselves in another culture and environment. For these students, the ability to travel joining with making progress toward their degree is a major draw. “Kayla” a freshman student at a prominent HBCU on the East Coast had this to say:

*“It’s a great opportunity to travel, truly experience another culture, without having to take a break from my education. We are required to take*



*four semesters of a foreign language, and what better way to learn than to immerse yourself into the culture?"*

Similarly, another young woman, "Abby", a "rising" Senior at a small, private, highly selective research institution in South East Texas stated that studying abroad in Spain while learning from Spanish doctors (she is pre-Med) seems like a fitting way to distinguish herself, have a new experience, and meet her educational obligations.

12 out of 20 participants (60%) indicated that they had "seriously" considered studying abroad; out of those students, 25% (3) have participated in a study abroad program. One such student, "Abby" stated this about her experience in Spain:

*"My experience abroad was definitely one that I will cherish. It is amazing to live in another country and be able to understand another culture. I think it can be challenging at first, but one has to change their mindset to one where they know that every day is a new opportunity to learn and you shouldn't feel timid about asking questions. I would recommend it to another African American student because I feel like more of us need to experience stuff like this to be able to tell the African American community. Depending on the country, it will be a bit of a change because there are not as many people of color, however yes, I would recommend it."*

Of the male respondents (7) only one has gone abroad and his sentiments echo those of "Abby". This subject, who will be referred to as "Harry" had this to say:

*"It placed me in a position to learn more about the government and the culture of the country. The experience served as an eye opener from the moment I stepped off the plane. The way the natives treated one another and how they behaved toward foreigners is very different from what I have seen in the States. I spent several days walking the streets of the capital and small villages on the coast and I always felt welcome."*

The 8 participants that opted out of studying abroad did so for a variety of reasons, equal to the importance of financial concerns, which will be discussed in more detail later. As indicated in previous research studies, such as the one by Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella in 2011, Black students are keenly aware of the benefits that study abroad programs bestow on their educational attainment and their career prospects, and have a positive view of the programs, even if they ultimately decide to abstain from participating themselves. This seems to be in keeping with the findings of numerous previous research studies.

### **Awareness of Programs and Ease of Informational Access**

All 20 subjects indicated that they had varying degrees of awareness of study abroad opportunities offered by their respective universities. These programs are

frequently advertised inside the study abroad office, the building in which the study abroad office is located, study abroad fairs, and by faculty who will be leading excursions. Most students indicated that they knew where the study abroad office was on their campus and that they understood that they would need to make an appointment with an advisor to get additional information. “Abby”, the pre-Med student on an excursion to Spain stated that the faculty leading the program she is partaking in was a primary resource of information when determining what program was correct for her.

There were 2 students that indicated that information was a little more challenging to locate on their campus. One subject, “Casey”, who is a freshman at a large, public institution in Georgia, noted that information on campus is, for the most part, easy to find—depending on the geographic location. “When it comes to finding info on programs in different countries to study abroad, it is harder to gain information.” The researcher inferred from this that much of the advertisement seen on study abroad programs are the most popular destinations in Europe, South and Central America, Asia, and Australia.

The lack of prominent advertising of programs that might be more specifically targeted to African American students in places of cultural and historical relevance to them (i.e. Africa) is something that has been suggested in the literature before by M’Balía in 2013, and by Lee and Green again in 2016.

### **Influence of Major Field of Study**

Studies by Luo and Jamieson-Drake in 2015 and others have indicated a correlation between major field of study and intent to study abroad. This is further corroborated by the participants in this particular study. 9 students (45%) indicated a “positive” correlation between major field of study and their intent/desire to study abroad; 7 students (35%) stated a “neutral” relationship existed between their major and their intent/desire to study abroad—meaning it did not influence them one way or the other.

One student that indicated his major had a positive influence on his desire to study abroad is “Donny”, who intimated that it would be “silly” for him to go his whole academic career without having given the thought serious consideration, since his major is Geography. Another student named “Lexi” indicated that her major in Marine Biology has “tremendously” influenced her desire to study abroad. For her, this is further punctuated by the fact that her university—a small, Christian university in a large city in Oklahoma—has island campuses that offer specialty programs in marine biology. Most other students that indicated a positive correlation between their major and their desire to study abroad were influenced by the fact that their

majors easily lend themselves to cross-cultural competency training in their respective future fields.

4 of the 20 participants interviewed noted their major field of study had a negative impact on their desire to study abroad. Their majors were a determining factor in them deciding to abstain from participation in a program. One student named “Omar” stated:

*“My hopes to get into medical school right after obtaining my bachelor’s degree factored into my decision for not considering study abroad program. I want to graduate a semester early. If I studied abroad, I do not believe I would be able to graduate early.”*

Similarly, another student named “Nina” cited concerns related to completing her degree path in a timely manner, saying:

*“I decided to double major and the additional hours have limited the number of free hours I have. If the credit from a study abroad opportunity didn’t transfer, I would be taking 18+ hours for my last semesters at [my university].”*

Both “Nina” and “Omar” are upperclassmen at a small, private, Tier 1 university in South East Texas where it is customary for students to double major. Their scheduling is frequently inflexible for this reason, depending on exactly what they are studying. This generally leads to concerns about matriculation time and meeting academic requirements to secure their degree. These concerns directly influence their decisions regarding special academic excursions, like study abroad programs.

### **Influence of Finances**

Most literature about study abroad participation for US students indicates that financing a study abroad program is a principal concern and determinant as to whether a student will ultimately pursue one during their undergraduate years (Simon & Ainswoth, 2012). It is true that the issue of finances is important to the students surveyed in the current study as well. 8 out of 20 students (40%) indicated finances would negatively impact their decisions regarding study abroad, with the most common complaint being: how do I manage the expense?

The most common view that students expressed was, as student “Rita” put it:

*“Studying abroad is pretty expensive. It would definitely be the only reason that I would reconsider doing it, though the potential to see new things, eat good food, and learn from a different part of the world outweigh the potential price.”*

“Rita” represents the 8 students that have expressed the belief that their financial aid will not cover part or any of the study abroad programs *that they are aware*

of. The remaining 12 participants (60%) took a neutral stance on the concern of finance, as they appeared to somewhat cognizant of the fact that their aid—sometimes all, and sometimes part—can be applied to any number of different types of study abroad programs. The responses, as well as the researcher’s own study abroad and international student experiences indicate one thing: there is a gross misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about exactly how financial aid works in relation to study abroad, what programs are available, and how both of these influence financing available to students.

### **Influence of Interpersonal Relationships**

As noted by Wang et. Al. in their 2016 study, and (Petzold & Peter, 2015) “subjective norms” are frequently set by a student’s interpersonal connections in their immediate environment—meaning if it is the norm for those around us to do a particular thing or activity, chances are that we will engage as well. It should then be expected that interpersonal relationships with family, peers, and respected faculty all have an effect on the opinion the subjects have about study abroad and have influenced their intent to study abroad.

Pre-Med student “Abby” stated that the professor currently leading her study tour group was a determining factor in her deciding to participate. The professor in question is the only foreign language professor in that subject at her home university, and she felt most comfortable following her on an educational excursion abroad.

Sometimes, the environment of the entire institution itself can lend credence to the thought of international education and global outlook to students. Such is the case with “Harry”, the non-traditional undergraduate student at the large research institution in a large metropolitan city in Texas.

*“[My home institution] is an incredibly diverse campus with students from every corner of the globe. I have had the pleasure of making friends with students from Zambia, South Korea, and a great many other places, so a positive influence to try new things was always present.”*

For this participant, studying abroad himself was a natural progression of experience based on the “norms” of his university environment. All of the students indicated that they had at least one friend that had studied abroad, and frequently described it as a “transformative” experience. Most students also noted that their families would be in support of their decisions to go abroad, with a few students noting the only caveat being the student managing to get a program financed. Overall, the responses suggest that friends, family and those in their academic environment serve as positive conduits of support for study abroad aspirations.

### **Influence of Other Factors**

Some of the most interesting revelations about barriers to African American student participation in study abroad programs during this study came from the influence of factors other than those previously discussed. 80% of students (16) had other extenuating factors that heavily influenced their decisions regarding study abroad outside of awareness, finances, major, or interpersonal influences. The most notable influence had to do with university related obligations and requirements.

For example, 6 students indicated concerns about meeting graduation deadlines and requirements and meeting particular academic requirements. This was touched on briefly in prior sections. For some students, study abroad is untenable simply because they cannot fit it into their undergraduate degree timetable. Students that were double majored, concerned about graduating “on time” or majoring in fields related to medicine (3 students) all decided that was the main determining factor in not studying abroad.

There were 5 students that identified as “student athletes” and they unanimously decided against study abroad programs for that reason. As their education is directly financed by their participation in playing on a university athletic team, combined with the regular academic rigors, it is pretty clear why these particular students see study abroad as something unattainable during their undergraduate degree. One student, “Kenya” had this to say: “I am an athlete, so time is very sensitive. I have very few months out of the year off, so going abroad would be a major investment of time.” Or as another student athlete put it simply, “I cannot study abroad due to my athlete obligations at [my university].”

A few other students cite more personal reasons for potentially or ultimately deciding against study abroad. One young woman is a single mother and acknowledges the challenges of such an undertaking with a young child. Another young woman notes the rigors and responsibilities of applying for a program and then navigating one on her own since she has never been alone before. Two young male student athletes noted their reticence to leave their mother’s behind for so long. These concerns speak more to individual factors (Stroud, 2010) than they do institutional level factors, unlike the issues faced by student athletes and those with heavy course loads.

### **Influences at the Institutional Level**

The participant samples were drawn from 3 research intensive universities in Texas, 1 HBCU in Washington DC, 1 research institution in Georgia, and 1 Christian university in Oklahoma.

The researcher searched the study abroad websites for all universities indicated above and found all universities had an office or site on campus where students can

physically go to get information to meet with an advisor; all universities hosted *hundreds* of programs of various types such as exchange, direct enrollment, faculty-led, affiliate, and service learning. Program lengths were from a few weeks to a full academic year. Perhaps most importantly, all universities stated that student financial aid can be used to finance up to the entirety of a student's study abroad program fees. This was dependent on program type and length, and university regulations regarding specific portions of financial aid. Students were strongly encouraged to meet with a study abroad advisor to go over their financial options and programs that would suit them, their budget, and their academic timelines.

This finding implies that the students surveyed may not have been aware of the full scope of what their university offers them in regard to study abroad, as this information may not be easily accessible, and really is a matter of tailoring a program with the help of a professional. The ignorance of such resources may be keeping students that are keen to study abroad from participating.

## **Conclusion and Implications for Future Research**

### *Conclusions*

The attitudes African American students have toward study abroad are overwhelmingly positive and many do express desire/intent to participate but this study notes that there is a myriad of explanations behind why many may ultimately decide against participation. Students primarily worry about meeting academic requirements and financing their excursion—both are concerns that can be mostly mitigated at the institutional level.

Many students seemed to lack an in-depth understanding of how their financial aid—all subjects interviewed were on financial aid—can be leveraged to pay for their program. This indicated, at a deeper level, a lack of knowledge or understanding about the types of study abroad programs available and how the type affects the level of financial aid that can be used for financing. Traditionally, most universities host study abroad info sessions and fairs where students may come to learn about opportunities. Perhaps these avenues do not provide students with enough in-depth information right away regarding the most pressing concern for many of them—funding.

Advertising initiatives that convey the affordability of tailored programs to students, particularly those that are traditionally underrepresented in study abroad, may go a long way toward increasing the numbers. In the case of Black students—though not cited as an issue in this study—universities may also want to consider increasing advertisement for programs in geographic locations with cultural and historical significance to African Americans in a bid to get them to be more actively

engaged. One step to consider would be partnering with university Black Student Unions/Associations to disseminate such information.

University representatives for study abroad programs can also advise students early on that liaising with both a study abroad advisor and an academic advisor early in their undergraduate career can help them better shape and manage their academic schedules and requirements—by assisting them with making degree plans that account for study abroad. For many students, this may be a cumbersome feat of fore planning if they are not truly invested in the idea of study abroad for themselves. As for the students that indicate an interest, this could be a way to increase the odds that they actually do embark on a program.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

Future research can more closely explore how knowledgeable African American students are about study abroad programs offered at their institutions, possibly at the mid-point of their freshman year, since they should have been exposed to the information by then. Also, future research should enquire into assessing students of color *active intent* to study abroad—such as, have they gone to the office to collect brochures, searched the university study abroad website for programs, scheduled a meeting with an advisor? There is much in the literature regarding how students feel about the idea of going abroad but less about how they act on those feelings and ideas.

Future research may also conduct more in-depth examinations of students of color that go, return, and report their experience which will provide a wealth of information to institutions about how to entice other students of color who may be reticent. Most of the literature on the matter focuses on who does not study abroad and possible reasons why. More data on those that do go abroad can provide just as much information as those that do not. Study abroad is, in higher education circles, widely lauded as a primary method of imbuing the leaders of tomorrow with the intercultural competencies and global outlook to manage the challenges of the future (Zemach-Bersin, 2007). It is of utmost importance that we find a way to grant those among us who have, historically, had much less purchase to actively shape the world they live in by acquiring the tools to do so today.

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