

The Impact of Two Different Styles of Excursions during a Short-Term Undergraduate Study Abroad Experience

Jim Tanoos

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Abstract

Traditional Study Abroad (SA) programs offered by universities have a profound impact on the cultural awareness and adaptability of students who participate in these experiences. However, recently increased opportunities to engage in short-term SA experiences have prompted shifts in the planning and structuring of these trips to achieve the most impact on student development. SA's are particularly valuable for Americans due to the relative lack of global traveling by American students compared to students from other countries. Not coincidentally, the likelihood of an American failing in a future expatriate assignment is also comparatively high versus additional nationalities, although millennial Americans are more likely than any other group to receive such a position. This makes prior intercultural experiences through activities such as SAs all the more important to this generation of Americans as a steppingstone to their careers. This study will analyze the impact of two different styles and structures of trip tours and excursions on American SA students during a short-term experience.

Index terms—

1 Introduction

Traditional Study Abroad (SA) programs offered by universities have a profound impact on the cultural awareness and adaptability of students who participate in these experiences. However, recently increased opportunities to engage in short-term SA experiences have prompted shifts in the planning and structuring of these trips to achieve the most impact on student development. SA's are particularly valuable for Americans due to the relative lack of global traveling by American students compared to students from other countries. Not coincidentally, the likelihood of an American failing in a future expatriate assignment is also comparatively high versus additional nationalities, although millennial Americans are more likely than any other group to receive such a position. This makes prior intercultural experiences through activities such as SAs all the more important to this generation of Americans as a steppingstone to their careers. This study will analyze the impact of two different styles and structures of trip tours and excursions on American SA students during a short-term experience.

2 II. Literature Review and Background

Studying abroad has had a positive impact on the lives of many college students (Andrade et al., 2019; Malveaux & Raby, 2019). One student skillset on which SA programs have had the most profound effect is cultural awareness. ??adstübner and Ecke (2009, p. 41) noted that "cultural understanding is acquired most effectively" while being immersed in a SA environment. American students are even more likely to benefit from the cultural awareness gained during a SA because of America's comparative isolation from the rest of the world.

Medina-López Portillo (2004) found that intercultural sensitivity, which is "an individual's psychological ability to deal with cultural differences", is an important outcome of a SA for American students and surmised that, "given the growing emphasis on internationalizing higher education and the rapidly increasing number of students embarking on study abroad programs each year, research on?cultural learning is assuming greater value and relevance"

2 II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

44 Author: e-mail: jtanoos@purdue.edu (p. 179-180). Universities in the US are increasingly attempting to
45 make SA programs more available to remedy this lack of experience in immersion into new cultures.

46 The duration of traditional American SAs has been at least one semester (16 weeks). During this time,
47 students live on campus or in a host home and become immersed in the local culture not only on their college
48 campuses but also in the surrounding community. This traditional model of a SA fully integrates the student into
49 the local culture outside of the regularly scheduled activities and SA classroom responsibilities. These traditional
50 SAs offer American students a great deal of experiential learning because of the free time students can use to
51 explore. (Soberts Selmer, 2017). Most American expatriate failures result from the employee's inability to adjust
52 to the new culture, and a lack of organizational focus on cultural adjustments has been commonly indicated as
53 a key reason (Selmer, 1995; Harris, 2012; Weber, 2013). American multinational companies have historically done
54 a poor job of anticipating these difficulties and training workers to enter another culture when assigned abroad
55 (Brewster & Pickard, 1994). (Fung (1982) stated that in 1982, 69% of European companies provided cultural
56 training of any sort versus only 32% of US organizations. (Brewster and Pickard (1994, p. 18) confirmed
57 that "cross-cultural training has long been advocated as a means of facilitating adjustment to the expatriate
58 environment". Lowe (2005) suggested that the job performance of American expatriates often suffers as a result
59 of not feeling comfortable in their new environment, while Breiden et al. (2004) found that expatriates who
60 adjust well tend to be more committed to the organization. (Maris (2012, p. 184) stated that the key to success
61 in a typical expatriate assignment is "extra-cultural" openness. The most successful American expatriates are
62 happy in both their jobs and their private lives while abroad.

63 The desire to remedy this failure to effectively integrate into international assignments has contributed to the
64 growing number of SA opportunities that US universities now offer, as well as the increased emphasis on the
65 pedagogy of structuring a SA for American students.

66 Calahan (2017) found that changes in attitudes about intercultural openness allow American students to feel
67 comfortable interacting with those from other cultures and consequently to initiate and develop relationships
68 with them. Partially due to the more difficult adjustments for Americans working abroad, past studies on SAs
69 have focused on areas related to culture such as appropriate student preparation for the trip (Kruse & Brubaker,
70 2007). Bacon (2002) examined how to structure student pre-trip assignments to best ease the cultural adjustment
71 process during SAs, and Hammer (2012) stated that building intercultural competence should be a "core mission"
72 of an American SA (p. 116).

73 The youngest working generation of Americans, the "millennial" generation, or those born between 1980-2000
74 (Rainer & Rainer, 2011), has been said to be the most important generation affecting overall American economic
75 interests (New Strategist Publications, 2015). However, American millennials may be having a more difficult
76 time with expatriate assignments than previous generations even though they "are likely to be acutely affected
77 by globalization" (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 235), and are more likely to travel internationally than previous
78 American generations (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). Because American millennials want to "work abroad at some
79 point in their career" (Global positions are often assigned to younger members of the organization because
80 of the lower costs associated with moving younger people compared to older employees who may have larger
81 families. Nevertheless, American millennials differ from prior generations in the way they successfully integrate
82 into an organization after college. For instance, achieving a work-life balance is a key organizational issue that
83 American millennials greatly value, and one that has caused unsuccessful integration into organizations after
84 college. Furthermore, millennials' ability to integrate with other generations of coworkers even within their home
85 culture remains "widespread concern" (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 225). Further, millennials expect rapid
86 advancement in addition to a satisfying life outside of work (Ng et al., 2010), which often hinges on their ability
87 to adjust to new assignments in different geographic regions.

88 The number of American students participating in SA programs has nearly doubled since 2000 (Ubl et al.,
89 2017). One reason for this is the increased availability and feasibility of short-term SA's (those lasting less than
90 a full semester) (Brubaker, 2007). In fact, the percentage of Americans choosing a short-term SA increased from
91 48% in 1998 to 56% in 2004 (Hulstrand, 2006) and surpassed the number of traditional SA's in 2006 (Bhandari
92 & Blumenthal, 2010). American students are most likely to sign-up for a short-term SA versus a traditional SA
93 as compared to students from other countries (Gibson et al., 2012; Martinsen 2011; (Eardorff, 2015).

94 Medina-López Portillo (2004) confirmed that the duration of the programs does indeed significantly impact the
95 development of student intercultural sensitivity, so the structure of short-term SA's has become more important
96 because these programs give students less time for experiential learning compared to traditional SA's. Therefore,
97 as the popularity of these programs has grown, scholars have started studying the best practices to ensure that
98 students achieve the most cultural learning in the limited amount of time they have.

99 Teichler and Steube (1991) found that the planned logistics of a SA trip will make or break students'
100 experiences. Barkley and Barkley (2013) reported that cultural encounters are an important ingredient of a
101 short-term SA if administered appropriately, and Brubaker (2007, p. 118) pointed out that "cultural learning
102 should become an integral and explicit component of short-term study abroad". Scholars have pointed out that if
103 a short-term SA is planned and coordinated appropriately, true cultural awareness and insight can be adequately
104 gained (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004; Martinsen, 2011; Vande Berg et al., 2012). (Brubaker (2007, p.118) commented
105 that that it is the responsibility of the SA leader to "support the need for integrating culture learning into short
106 term study abroad" during the planning stages of the trip. During these planning stages, structural immersions

107 in the SA program are the best means of allowing students to gain an understanding of culture. Gibson et al.
108 (2012) found that students showed greater interest in their discipline-specific area (agriculture in their study)
109 during their short-term SA. They proposed that the leader must ensure two essential elements during the planning
110 process to ensure adequate learning in a short-term SA: 1) a focus on technical discipline-specific content that is
111 more often inherent in short-term SA's, and 2) cultural content areas that may be more inherent in traditional
112 SA programs.

113 3 III. Data and Methodology

114 This analysis utilized a predictive study based on Gibson et al.'s (2012) suggestion that technical and cultural
115 content are the two key learning components of short-term SAs.

116 A predictive study is a type of experimental design which is utilized when aiming to ascertain when and in what
117 situations an event will occur. In this case, the goal was to discover which of two types of tours and excursions
118 prompted students to desire to learn more about both the local culture and/or the local industries/economy.
119 This study will attempt to predict a relational hypothesis or a causal hypothesis, or if a type of tour prompted
120 a specific positive reaction.

121 This study assessed 30 undergraduate students from a public higher education institution (which is a member
122 of the Association of American Colleges & Universities) during a 3-credit SA trip that took place over the course
123 of 14 days in May 2018. All the students were majoring in a technology-related field. This trip covered four cities
124 in three Central European countries, all of which were listed among the top 32 European cities for millennials
125 to live (Bloom, 2017). Surveys were distributed (see appendix A) immediately after the official trip tours in order
126 to determine which types of activities stimulated an appetite for subsequent learning. To specifically address the
127 concepts raised by Gibson et al. (2012), students were surveyed about what types of excursions prompted them
128 to want to learn more about 1) local culture and 2) local industries/economy.

129 To ensure that only the millennial students were sampled, students were asked their year of birth on the
130 survey. Following Rainer & Rainer's (2011) definition of a millennial as one born after 1980, 21 students of the
131 30 students were classified as millennials and were used as the sample set in the study. A total of 19 official
132 excursions were planned during the trip. 13 were labeled as cultural and 6 were labeled as technical based on
133 their content. Survey questions were developed in light of Gibson et al.'s (2012) definitions of "cultural content"
134 and "technical content" and included the following: 1) As a result of this tour do you want to learn more about
135 their culture? (Do you want to take holidays there, spend money on entertainment there, etc.?) and 2) As a
136 result of this tour do you want to learn more about their industries/economy? (Do you want to work there,
137 want to engage in business with a partner there, etc.?) (see appendix A). Moderating variables are believed to
138 have a noteworthy contingent effect on the independent variable/dependent variable relationship. As such, the
139 moderating variables in this survey were 1) the tour guide/activity leaders, which students would rate from 1-5,
140 and 2) the length of the activity, which students would rate from 1-5 (too long, a bit too long, just about right,
141 a bit too short, too short).

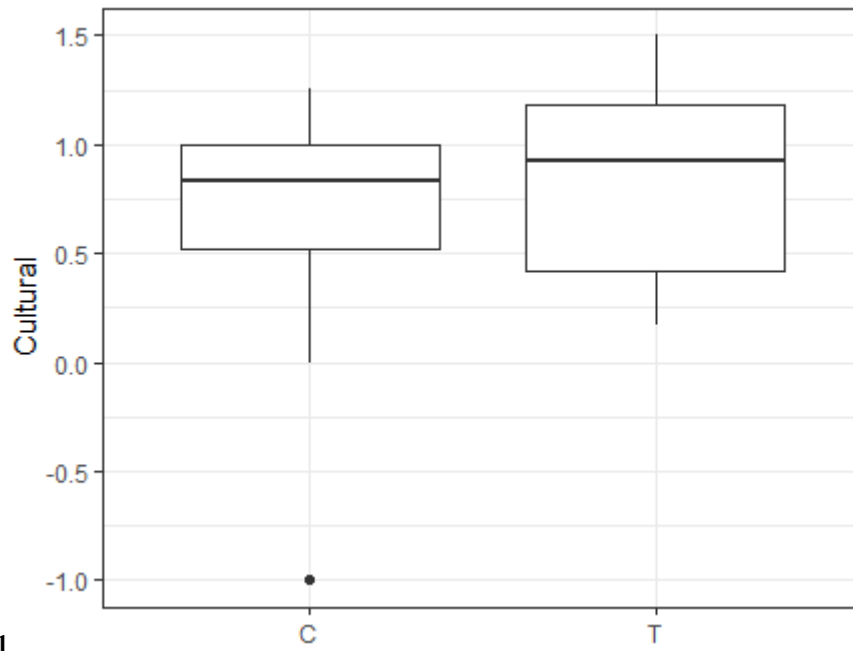
142 4 IV. Results

143 The official tours were structured and organized based on two clear themes: cultural and technical, and
144 to investigate which type of tour prompted students to want to learn more about local culture or local
145 industries/economy, weighted regression models were assigned separately with tour characteristics (C for cultural
146 vs T for technical), tour guide rating, tour length, and the interaction between tour guide and length explanatory
147 variables. To better visualize the distribution of cultural scores and industrial scores, box plots are included below.
148 2 shows the industry/economy test results. According to the data, the characteristic of a tour (C or T) does
149 not have a significant effect on determining a student's interest in learning about the local culture ($p=0.0747$).
150 However, tour characteristic (C vs T) is significant in influencing a student's inclination to subsequently explore
151 the economic and industrial facets of a city ($p < 0.0001$). More specifically, the technical-related tour (labeled as
152 "Char T") has a positive estimated coefficient (0.3708), indicating that as the value of the independent variable
153 (technical tour rating) increased, the mean of the dependent variable (the willingness to want to learn more about
154 that city's industries/economy, want to work there, etc.) also tended to increase compared with a culture-related
155 tour. The data depicted in Tables 1 and 2 suggest that a technical-related tour will motivate students to learn
156 more about local industry. As such, a causal hypothesis, which is an assertion that describes a relationship
157 between two variables whereas one variable leads to a definitive effect on the other variable, may be inferred.
158 That is, since the tours for this SA were associated with the student majors, technical-related tours that promoted
159 and showcased local successful manufacturing and industry motivated students to want to learn more about the
160 local economy, want to work there, etc.

161 This study might also be replicated with other types of SA experimental designs. For instance, future studies
162 may analyze SA's based in different areas of the world, other generations of Americans on SA's, or SA students
163 from other majors. For example, a SA for art majors could focus on and include museum content, while a
164 program for agriculture majors could involve excursions based on farm/rural content. This study might be
165 additionally helpful for international organizations that aim to ease the cultural adjustment process for new
166 expatriate American workers. As such, the expenses lost to failed assignments may be saved by training and

4 IV. RESULTS

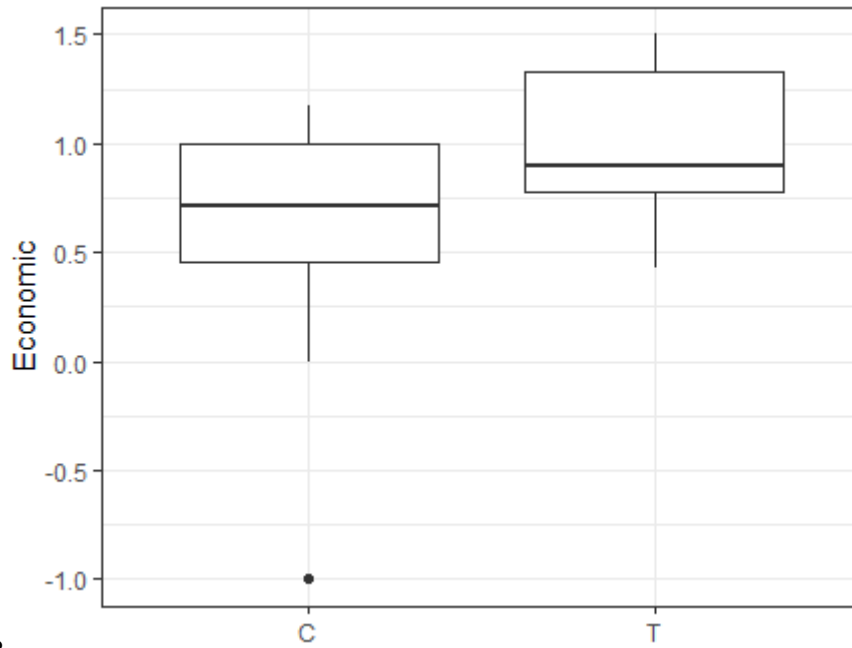
167 preparation that are specific to their careers, such as the planning of technical-related activities in advance of
168 their work duties and/or during the early stages of their tenure at the new position. While cultural activities
169 as a potential build-up to an international assignment may be appealing on the surface, technical-specific tours
may have a better likelihood of predicting the success of the expatriate in the international assignment.



1

Figure 1: Figure 1 :

170



2

Figure 2: Figure 2 :

Figure 3:

1

Figure 4: Table 1

1

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	-0.3325	0.3353	-0.992	0.3312	
CharT	0.1692	0.0908	1.864	0.0747	
Rating	0.1454	0.03651	3.983	0.0001	***
Length	0.5891	0.25436	2.316	0.0294	*

Figure 5: Table 1 :

2

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	-0.8343	0.2782	-2.999	0.0062	**
CharT	0.3708	0.0753	4.923	0.0000	***
Rating	0.2046	0.0303	6.754	0.0000	***
Length	0.3922	0.2110	1.859	0.0753	

V. Reactions/Future Studies

Figure 6: Table 2 :

171 As a result of this tour do you want to learn more about their culture? (Do you want to take holidays
172 there, spend money on entertainment there, etc.?) _____much less apt to want to learn more about
173 their culture _____somewhat less apt to want to learn more about their culture _____the same in
174 wanting to learn more about their culture _____somewhat more apt to want to learn more about their
175 culture _____much more apt to want to learn more about their culture As a result of this tour do you
176 want to learn more about their industries/economy? (Do you want to work there, want to engage in business
177 with a partner there, etc.?) _____much less apt to want to learn more about their industries/economy
178 _____somewhat less apt to want to learn more about their industries/economy _____the same in
179 wanting to learn more about their industries/economy _____somewhat more apt to want to learn more
180 about their industries/economy much more apt to want to learn more about their industries/economy Appendix
181 A _____

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