To Study or Not To Study: A Critical Look at Study Abroad

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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ABSTRACT

Study abroad participation has been increasing every year across the United States – at Ball State alone, 45% more students studied abroad in 2003-2004 than did in 2001-2002, with 563 students studying abroad in the 2003-2004 school year. Every year, more students are experiencing the cultural interaction that study abroad allows and are gaining the social and career skills that study abroad promises. The Ball State Center for International Programs, like other study abroad offices at U.S. universities, is excited about these participation increases and has begun promoting its study abroad programs more vigorously in recent years.

However, without concrete assessment of what students are learning abroad and with universities’ focus resting entirely on increasing participation numbers rather than on ensuring the quality of study abroad programs, the purpose of study abroad may be slipping away from educational concerns and toward tourist interests. Unless universities begin paying more attention to how they advertise and discuss study abroad – by promoting the cultural interactions available in a program, rather than students’ opportunities to see famous sites, for example – students may increasingly view study abroad as a way to see the world, from a tourist perspective, rather than as a way to interact with unfamiliar cultures and learn about those cultures as well as their own American culture. The possibilities for student growth through study abroad must not be neglected by irresponsible marketing of study abroad programs.
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To Study or Not To Study: A Critical Look at Study Abroad

The Ball State University study abroad website promises students that “The World Awaits” – in fact, it’s the site’s theme. For students at any American university these days, there is no escaping the loud and persistent message that the world is waiting for them to explore, discover, experience, realize. In this paradigm, the world outside of the United States is inactive and unable to move or live or breathe; it can do nothing but wait. Thus, the American college student is empowered to move, to travel, to study anywhere and to explore anything, while the destinations she may or may not choose to visit can do nothing more than subserviently wait, entire cultures resting on bookshelves – more vast and vibrant bookshelves than students’ history books rest upon, but still neglected spaces – waiting to enlighten and open up for the adventurous and motivated American student. The hierarchy is firmly in place: the world is waiting for your action; you are in charge.

At Ball State, the spiel of the study abroad office – a division of the Center for International Programs – has recently been built into the Freshman Orientation program so that students begin hearing about the necessity of study abroad early and often; if the world is waiting for these students, there’s no reason to waste time until they are upperclassmen to inform them of their status as stewards of the world. Both the addition of study abroad information to Freshman Orientation and the launch of a new and flashy website were developments made within the current school year, according to the Center for International Programs’s 2003-2004 Study Abroad Report. In other words, study abroad is no longer a buzzword or a far-off and broad educational objective; it’s a real mission.

And the results of these concerted efforts speak for themselves: Ball State study abroad
programs reached an enrollment of 563 for the 2003-2004 school year – showing an increase of almost 45% in just two academic years ("Study Abroad Report" 3). Furthermore, a decade prior, study abroad enrollment at Ball State was only 235, indicating a nearly 240% increase over those 10 years (Ledsinger 9). This rate of acceleration in study abroad programs has been observed nationwide, with the number of American students studying abroad more than doubling between the 1991-1992 and 2001-2002 school years – from 71,154 to 160,920 in ten years (Dolby 152).

And as more students participate in study abroad, more programs and options open up: BSU offered more than 200 study abroad options last year ("Study Abroad Report" 6), while in 1997 there were only about 53 programs available (Ledsinger 32). So as more opportunities for study abroad appear and are marketed, students become more likely to feel that there is a world awaiting them, waiting simply to be found, and as they feel that the world is more open and accessible, more and more students will begin to consider studying abroad. This seems to have become, then, a self-perpetuating system leading to nearly exponential growth of both options and participation for study abroad. With this being the case, universities seem to generally focus on increasing participation, driving numbers higher, creating more opportunities for more students to study abroad, with little or no regard to measuring exactly how much they’re learning while they’re there – or what, exactly, they are learning. As Northwestern University’s Study Abroad Office director wrote, “Internationalization and globalization don’t magically happen by sending ever-higher numbers of students abroad. [...] They take place in the minds of individual students as a result of challenging and active academic study and interaction on site” (qtd. in Gillespie par. 11).

With administrators focusing on increasing the numbers of students studying abroad and little attention being paid to how much the study abroad experience is about study and how much
it’s about just being abroad, the message of study abroad offices has recently become: students should study abroad, without further qualification of what study abroad is. The danger of the idea that students must study abroad – no matter where or when or how or for how long, and no matter what they learn – is that the study abroad experience will become more of a tourist experience. And, in that, study abroad could lose sight of its purpose as an opportunity for encounters with diverse cultures and for readjustment of the American perspective with a global consciousness, unless better attention is paid to placing students in situations that truly challenge their views of other cultures and their own.

According to Jim Coffin, director of Ball State’s Center for International Programs, there are no existing efforts by Ball State to measure students’ growth or education while abroad. He mentioned, however, that there are efforts by the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) to “gauge it, to come up with statistical tests,” and that “We ought to apply those studies [at Ball State] and not just trust [the students’ accounts of their abroad experiences]” (Coffin). But still, at Ball State and many other universities, “study abroad today relies upon a clean and simple but clearly limited statistical gauge [as a measure of its success], that of the raw number or percentage” (Engle 2, emphasis mine). This statistical gauge is limited in that even if study abroad numbers are increasing, universities must be able to prove that students’ cultural awareness and global consciousness are likewise increasing, or the purpose of study abroad becomes questionable.

In its 2002-2003 goals, The Forum on Education Abroad discussed potential outcomes assessment efforts that included quantitative and qualitative studies, from interviews to case studies; longitudinal studies, which involve tracking career success and satisfaction, use of language skills later in life and evidence of multicultural activity or international involvement
later in life; and retrospective longitudinal studies, which involve all of the assessments in the longitudinal studies but add a look at participants’ memories of the study abroad experience (par. 17). These assessment techniques, as proposed, intended to measure the following possible outcomes of study abroad:

- cross-cultural skills, knowledge, perceptions
- acquisition of discipline, base[d] knowledge
- gains in second language acquisition
- emotional intelligence (par. 15)

and the impacts that study abroad programs have on the home institution (par. 18). So there is a model for study abroad assessment that has been proposed and activated, to some degrees, by certain intuitions, but Ball State relies only on participation numbers – lacking even participant demographic statistics – to measure its study abroad programs, and Ball State claims its students are learning from their studies abroad and are gaining cultural awareness based entirely on the stories of students’ travels and adventures, rather than any qualitative analysis. Few will question whether or not study abroad generally increases global- and self-awareness or improves cross-cultural understanding, but universities must remember that without assessment or proof that these are the changes occurring, there is no guarantee that students are “intercultural learners’ – as opposed to academic tourists” (Gillespie par. 7).

Indeed, the foundation of tourism as we know it today has been repeatedly traced back to the “Grand Tours” of the 18th century, as well as other “noble” pursuits. In a chapter of her book Tourists and Tourism, Sharon Bohn Gmelch notes that “Travel for pleasure is historically linked to other quests: the pursuit of profit (trade and commerce), of spiritual renewal (pilgrimage), of knowledge (e.g., the “Grand Tour”), of adventure (early exploration), and of health” (5). So as
tourism and pleasure travel were founded, at least in part, on the educational pursuit of traveling to foreign lands, study abroad flip-flops the progression by seeming to be perpetuated, if not founded, upon tourist-like longings to travel, rather than on interest in engaging with an alien culture. Therefore, “Grand Tour” and Study Abroad experiences may be quite similar, in that society places great emphasis on the educational value of travel in these ways, but in the end all the students may be left with is a series of memories or, in the modern case, photographs of foreign places with very little deeper understanding of them. The concern, then, is that the study abroad experience is not a sufficient way of “experiencing other cultures,” or gaining cultural awareness, but is merely a means by which students check dream destinations off of their lists—as tourists.

**SO WHY DO STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD?**

Study abroad requires significant amounts of time and money for students, in addition to the emotional taxation of preparing for, actually being on and then returning home from a stint abroad. Students who return from study abroad experiences rarely claim that classes or travels or any of their activities abroad were easy; in fact, they rarely invest less than monumental importance in what they’ve learned and how they’ve done it. So, why is the difficult, time-consuming and expensive endeavor of study abroad an enticing option for so many students?

Coffin, who leads students on trips abroad in addition to running the Center for International Programs, says that his students study abroad for many reasons, among them: seeking an adventurous break from the monotony of college life in Muncie, connecting with their heritages, finding history in the places it happened rather than their textbooks, seeing the world, gaining employability and improving their foreign language skills. Ball State student Gina Sands
studied abroad in Ireland this year and she cited her Irish heritage as a major motivation for choosing to study in Ireland, claiming that she wanted to see where her ancestors lived -- which is, not surprisingly, also among the top reasons that tourists travel to Ireland.

Coffin further noted that students are studying abroad for practical reasons as well, one being that the college years are a "wonderful time" to study abroad because the group discounts, university housing and other student benefits make travel abroad much cheaper for students than for out-of-school adults, and another being that "people are realizing that you have to have some globalization in your background." In fact, globalization and having a global perspective are important to students in all areas of study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Number of Students Studying Abroad, by Major</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math &amp; Computer Sci.</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Mgm't</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fine or Applied Arts</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Sciences</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Languages</td>
<td>8%</td>
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("Open Doors" 2)
According to the latest *Open Doors* report (see graph above), 21.3 percent of students studying abroad in the 2002-2003 school year were in the social sciences, while business and management came in at a close second with 17.7 percent – almost 31,000 students – and humanities students claimed 13.3 percent of the overall study abroad population (2). Foreign language students, surprisingly enough, made up only 7.9 percent of study abroad participants, a decline from the 8.5 percent they claimed the year before. And while administrators and researchers often note the lack of programs catering to the course loads of science students, in the 2002-2003 school year, the physical sciences, health science and math and computer sciences combined rivaled the humanities with 12.7 percent of the study abroad population (2).

Furthermore, in today's globalized world, employers in virtually every field – especially business, the second-most-popular major among study abroad students – are seeking job candidates with foreign language competence and cultural adaptability. According to Charles Baquet of the international center at Xavier University in Louisiana,

> If you have on your resume that you know a language and haven’t been off campus, that’s not that impressive. But when you see someone who has studied in Martinique, you see a person who has learned another language and is comfortable with another culture [...] Employers think, here’s a person who is adventuresome, intelligent and probably creative. If they’ve been in a developing country, they’re not afraid of difficult situations. (qtd. in Yates par. 6)

Regarding college-educated applicants who have studied abroad, employers are seeking both the practical results of the international experience – experience living in a foreign culture and foreign language proficiency – as well as the personal growth that administrators like Coffin praise study abroad for instigating – courage, independence, creative problem-solving, desire for
change, a global worldview. This makes plenty of sense for business students, but agriculture students comprised the smallest population of study abroad students, with only 1.5 percent (Open Doors 2), indicating that such international experience and knowledge aren’t considered as vital for students on career tracks unlikely to take them physically abroad – despite the fact that even farmers live in a global world and being informed of foreign agricultural practices or agricultural trade methods couldn’t hurt any farmer. Even undeclared students claimed 3.5 percent of the study abroad population, which means more than twice as many undeclared students (6,048) studied abroad as agriculture students (2,563) did in 2002-2003 (2).

So between the financial ease, the employment practicality, the desire to see the world, the adventure and the personal changes promised, study abroad draws in many of its students, but we can’t ignore that, for many students, international travel is simply a given, an expected part of the college career – the question isn’t if they’ll travel abroad, it’s where and when.

In the 2001 article “What direction for study abroad? 2 views,” John A. Marcum discusses an American Council on Education survey that determined study abroad was important to 70 percent of high school seniors seeking colleges, almost half of whom intended to study abroad in college (par. 2). Earlier, the same council surveyed 1,006 adults and found that more than 750 of them – more than 75 percent – felt that study abroad was an important part of students’ college experiences (par.2). One implication of the survey is that study abroad is more than a convenient, practical or exciting prospect for the college student, but it is an opportunity many students just expect will be a part of their college careers – and one that many adults also feel is necessary. So not only is study abroad a priority for university administrators, but it’s becoming a priority for students, parents and employers. It’s becoming normalized.

In the same article, David Roochnik explains that, “Of course, certain students can
benefit enormously from studying abroad. Students majoring in Chinese *have every reason* to study in Beijing, where they can become immersed in the language. The art-history major with a particular interest in the Renaissance *must* spend time in Florence” (par. 30, emphasis mine) – and we can add to his observation that social science and business students *will undoubtedly* benefit from experiencing the different cultures with which their companies will interact. In other words, one reason so many college students are going abroad is that they think they *should*. They are hearing from their parents, their academic advisors, their internship coordinators, their friends, even from TV commercials for the U.S. Navy that experience abroad is necessary for success in the world in which they are living, for the global marketplace, for the international context of their lives. They are also hearing, literally, that the university has made a priority of offering study abroad options to students and making those options as available as possible: they are hearing that the world awaits them.

Still, the truth is, study abroad participants make up less than 3 percent of the total undergraduate population at U.S. universities (par. 7). Only three American students out of one hundred decide to spend the time, money and effort it takes to study abroad – so schools, of course, are seeking to expand both the number of programs they offer and the ways in which they offer them, so that more and more students will sign up every year. This strategy of increasing the marketing and awareness of study abroad in order to increase participation seems to be working, judging by the dramatic annual increases in the number of students studying abroad; however, there are consequences to this method. There are sacrifices made in order to increase numbers. Between the unqualified endorsement of any study abroad opportunity, in the interest of increasing participation, and the lack of systematic measurement of what students are learning abroad, the programs students are going on can stray from the expressed goals of
internationalizing education and can shift, in some ways, into the realm of general travel and experience abroad, the realm of travel for pleasure rather than for academic pursuits.

In his discussion of the benefits students receive from study abroad, Roochnik adds: “Most students, however, do not go abroad for such specific academic work [as improving their language skills or studying the Renaissance where it happened], but rather for the general purpose of widening their horizons through travel and the experience of cultural diversity” (par. 30).

In fact, not all study abroad opportunities offer as a central concern “the experience of cultural diversity”; certainly, most study abroad programs list diversity and cultural awareness as reasons to participate, but sometimes the experience of study abroad is more about having been on a plane that crossed an ocean than it is about truly learning anything from another culture. As the global marketplace extends further and further into the remote countries and cultures of the planet, study abroad becomes more available with cheaper flights that go to more destinations and with partner universities in foreign countries that are growing and increasing their prestige – all of this, of course, simultaneously creates an environment in which experience abroad also becomes more necessary. With the extension of airplane routes, internet connections and satellite television reception areas, among other modernizing and globalizing forces, comes the homogenization of culture that many across the world refer to as Americanization; so the very media by which study abroad becomes cheaper, easier and more tempting are, for the American student, the same media by which studying abroad becomes more of an exercise in confirming one's own ever-spreading culture.

For students to gain the "cultural experience" that their universities and future employers are insisting they have, the students must engage in some level of interaction with the people in
the communities to which they are traveling. A tourist can easily jump into and out of a destination by catching the cheapest flights and can have virtually no interaction with the indigenous culture by utilizing tour bus offers or choosing tourist activities that do not engage with the locals themselves or their lifestyles and customs. With study abroad, a student can do virtually the same thing.

According to cultural anthropologist George Gmelch, who made a study of the journals and experiences of the 51 students he took to Austria on a study abroad excursion, “There was also some competition among the students, especially the men, to see how much of Europe they could cover with their Eurail passes. For many students, getting to know the places well mattered far less than being able to say they had been there” (421). He calls this practice “city-a-day tourism,” and notes the comments of one student: “I wanted to be able to go home and say that I saw as much as I could in the six weeks that I was here” (421). So, while the intentions of this group of students to study abroad may have been to improve their language skills, to gain future employability or to increase their global awareness, they instead became tourists, hopping from well-known location to well-known location – Gmelch notes Venice, Vienna, Prague, the Italian and French Rivieras and the Swiss Alps among the most popular destinations. The students were reaching their arms, hiking-booted feet and backpacks clear across Europe, but they were experiencing and meditating on the cultures and lifestyles of the people in those destinations very little.

As John Urry claims in The Tourist Gaze, “Isolated from the host environment and the local people, the mass tourist travels in guided groups and finds pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying ‘pseudo-events’ and disregarding the ‘real’ world outside” (7). Gmelch’s students rarely went on their excursions alone, instead generally traveling in packs of
more than five, and group sizes only declined – and even then only slightly declined – due to the difficulty of making decisions or finding accommodations for the larger groups (Gmelch 423). For the study abroad student, the appeal of “contrived attractions” and “pseudo-events” is extremely high as he travels with his friends in an “isolated” group, like Urry’s mass tourists. And after Gmelch’s students had seen much of Europe and studied for an extended period in Austria, he “was startled to see how shallow their engagement with the people and places they visited seemed to be. [...] there was very little evidence that the students had learned anything much about the local cultures and countries they visited. Their observations on the whole seemed to me to be naive and simplistic” (420).

Furthermore, they began their weekend excursions going to museums and historic sites, but as their time in Austria continued, they began seeking more and more touristy destinations for relaxation and entertainment (422). At the same time, this “hasty” travel habit led to students spending much of their time in train stations – one student calculated an average of three hours of waiting in stations and 18.7 hours of train riding per three-day weekend – and once they got on the trains they didn’t tend to look out the windows or engage in conversation with other travelers, instead they conversed with themselves and focused on the destinations they had in mind, as well as the destinations they’d seek next: as one student wrote, “They want to run to the goal and run back” (422).

For Ball State Mathematical Sciences professor Dr. John Emert, who heads a semester-long program at the University of Limerick in Ireland, study abroad students have their eyes opened by “exposure to cultures around the world” and “other perspectives,” and they have a deeper understanding of foreign cultures than tourists because they “make a second home [abroad].” He describes a tourist – unlike his students – as someone who “samples the candy,
meanders the streets and then goes home," but according to Gmelch’s study, study abroad students are often inclined to do the same thing. Study abroad students are told that the world awaits, so they visit; they are told that the experience of studying abroad is enriching and important, so they assume what they are learning, doing and experiencing is cultural awareness; however, they are sometimes caught off-guard by the fact that “people are much of the time ‘tourists’ whether they like it or not” (Urry 74).

WHERE ARE BSU STUDENTS AwaitED MOST?

BSU students go to 21 different countries on six of the seven continents, the 2003-2004 Study Abroad Report proudly declares (3). But while students can choose from programs on six continents across the entire globe, nearly 60% of the students go to the UK, Canada or Australia; another 19% go to Western Europe (2). One BSU student studied abroad in Thailand, one in Costa Rica, one in Kenya (2). To translate these statistics into a visual image, imagine that the western world full of English speakers, familiar television shows and other cultural comfort blankets composes nearly 80% of the world outside the United States, while Asia, Africa, and South America combined cover only 12% of the world that awaits. With this in mind, the study abroad view of the world seems not to be drawn to-scale. Coffin and Emert state that the purpose of study abroad is to broaden students’ minds, give them global perspectives, reduce ethnocentrism and, in doing so, help them to view America “in a different light.” But what parts of the globe are students being expected to cultivate this perspective in? Where are they going in order to reduce their ethnocentrism and rethink the American lifestyle? By and large, they’re going to Western Europe – the one area of the world most like the United States, outside of Canada. Asia, Africa and South America together claim a majority of the world’s land mass and
population, but can only attract 12% of Ball State’s study abroad student population. To Coffin, most students seem to choose western study abroad destinations – namely, London and Australia – because they are English speaking and the cultures are quite similar to American students’ own culture. More importantly, however, they travel to these places because “they probably dreamed about going” to them (Coffin). Ball State’s second most popular program, after the College of Architecture and Planning’s field study in Canada, is the London Centre, and the Australia Centre is not far behind; Ball State is currently working on building centre programs along the same model in France, Japan and Mexico, but Coffin doesn’t expect these new, more exotic centre programs to decrease participation in the London and Australia Centres much, if at all.

Perhaps this tendency of American students to study abroad in the most familiar settings available testifies to the effectiveness of study abroad promotional materials featuring the countries of the western world. However, a comparison of pamphlets for Western European study abroad programs and pamphlets for Asian study abroad programs would be difficult to make, because many of the companies producing these pamphlets print masses of them at a time and they come out identically for nearly every program offered. The only difference between European and Asian program promotion may be that Asian study abroad program pamphlets often spend more time than European program pamphlets convincing the students and parents that the destination is a worthwhile place to study: for Ball State programs, the Asian study pamphlets were titled “Study in Japan” or “Imagine Asia” or “Discover Korea” or even “Why China?”. (It should be noted that the Center for International programs did not have pamphlets available for any African study abroad programs offered by Ball State, so only Asian programs are mentioned here – but African programs would likely fall under the same stigma that Asian programs do.) In Karen Jenkins’ article “Off the Beaten Path,” she notes that “encouraging
students to study outside of Europe may require additional work since there are fewer academic programs in nontraditional locations. And there may be some difficulty in persuading campus administrators and students’ families that such locations are suitable” (par.8).

European programs, conversely, have the benefit of not needing to convince students and parents of the value of the programs because students already have the desire to visit these places so they do not need to be convinced of the educational or adventure value of the destinations. The program pamphlet titles, therefore, tend to consist of only the names of the places – adjectives are unnecessary because the place names are enticing enough. If the great-grandmother of study abroad is the 18th-century “Grand Tour” of Europe, then a central concern of study abroad is seeing the Mona Lisa and the David, or the architectural wonders of Europe’s cathedrals, or the historic landmarks of WWII, rather than the rice-picking villages of China or the bloated streets of India. Moreover, as Coffin mentioned, students are already “dreaming” of snapping photos of Big Ben, or gazing down from the Eiffel Tower, or romping on the beaches of Australia; fewer students dream of walking the Great Wall or strolling the streets of Tokyo, and even fewer students can note sites of international interest in Korea, Thailand, Malaysia or India. So study abroad marketing must convince students to study abroad in what Jenkins calls “nontraditional locations” by promising that they will “discover” the place or that they should “imagine” studying there, while the promise that Europe and Australia “await” students’ exploration is enough to generate interest in “traditional” locations. And the interest is much higher for western countries not just at BSU but also nationwide, with 63 percent of American study abroad students choosing Europe and participation in Australian study abroad programs having increased by 17 percent between the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years (Dolby 152).

This trend of western destinations overshadowing “nontraditional locations” further
indicates that students are choosing study abroad programs because they desire to visit those destinations – they have a tourist interest in them – rather than because the academic programs suit their needs or the cultural encounters they would have there seem more exciting. According to Urry, “Places are chosen to be gazed upon [by tourists] because there is anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy… Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce the gaze” (3). Because American students are more often exposed to images of the western world in “film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos” than they are exposed to images of Asia or Africa in the same, the effect of these media to generate tourist interest in Western Europe and Australia on a larger scale than in Asia and Africa likely translates to greater student interest in study abroad programs in those western nations, which is reflected in the fact that western programs are vastly more popular than eastern and African ones. The impulse to travel, then, is at least partly rooted in the desire to see well-known things or places and take self-portrait photos next to those famous sites, rather than in the desire for a challenging and eye-opening interaction with a culture that is vastly unlike one’s own. Certainly, heritage, personal safety, language barriers, cost and other factors help determine students’ interest in western countries for study abroad, but the correlation between the popularity of western tourist destinations and western study abroad destinations cannot be ignored.

Drawing on Jonathan Culler, Urry discusses one motivation for tourist interest in certain, specifically western, locations: “As Culler argues: ‘the tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself … All over the world the unstrung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical
American thruways, traditional English pubs" (qtd. in Urry 3). As is indicated in the examples that Culler – and, by extension, Urry – lists, travelers leave home in search of the signifiers of certain cultures that they identify and gather from the “variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce the gaze” (3). So, therefore, a tourist – as well as a study abroad student – would be more likely to desire the collection of the more recognizable signs, the signs that have higher cultural cachet, the signs that are available in the western world – Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower, the Sydney Opera House, the Parthenon – than those available in the eastern world, allowing, of course, for the signs as recognizable as The Great Wall of China. With study abroad students overwhelmingly choosing to study in the locations that offer the collection of the most notable signs rather than in locations with less-recognizable or unrecognizable signs but greater cultural differences, we can see the tourist-like intentions of many study abroad students peeking through the label of study abroad.

So, the intentions of study abroad students cannot be entirely separated from the intentions of tourists because the motivations for choosing the locations they study in may be owing to the tourist-friendly images of those cultures found in media just as much as those motivations may be owing to study-abroad-specific promotional materials. While study abroad program directors will usually argue adamantly that study abroad students are not tourists because they are encountering new cultures in a different way than the tour-bus-riding, lemming-like tourists, I would argue that at least the initial impulse to participate in study abroad is likely rooted in the same impulses to travel in general – as touristy as they are. This would in part explain, then, the higher percentage of students participating in western-country programs because there is a likewise high percentage of tourists seeking western countries over eastern or African destinations. Likewise, that notion that students are studying in places they “dream” of
visiting, rather than places where they would be most likely to encounter unfamiliar cultural practices, indicates that students are imagining study abroad and anticipating it in similar ways to how tourists dream of visiting a place before actually compiling the funds and vacation time to take the trip.

What all of these touristy motivations for traveling abroad boil down to is that the western world is more recognizable – as well as more approachable and more familiar – so it becomes both a more appealing destination for study abroad students and a destination more acceptable and appreciated by parents, university administrators and future employers. Just as a student traveler may see a trip to London as more enticing than a trip to Malaysia or Kenya because he is more able to anticipate the culture, people and sites he will encounter there, parents, educators and employers may be convinced that travel to Europe is sufficient for building cultural awareness because it allows the collection of myriad recognizable “signs” with great cultural cachet – in short, more people know Europe, so they’re more impressed when they hear that a student has gone there. If a student tells a future employer that he’s been to Armenia or Burma, but the employer cannot find those countries on a map, let alone understand what cultural experiences that means the student has had, the employer – as well as the students’ parents, friends and professors – is probably less likely to be impressed that he has been to those locations. As the global marketplace increases the business world’s reach into further and less familiar locations, this may change and study abroad programs may adapt. But, for now, people are impressed by the Eiffel Tower because society has invested that “sign” with plenty of value, and this is partly how western destinations become not only more desirable to students but also more acceptable by the standards of institutions, parents and employers. These standards of what makes a meaningful study abroad experience may also be how society can encourage tourism
among study abroad students more than it encourages face-to-face cultural interaction.

While these tourist motivations are not the only reasons students choose to study in the western over the eastern world – cost, distance, credit transfers, length of programs, safety and other factors all play major roles in those decisions – it is important to note that the label of "student" doesn’t entirely free a traveler from her status as "tourist," nor from the American tourist’s bias toward the comfort and ease of traveling in the western world. However, we should not be satisfied knowing that the pursuit of study abroad largely consists, for more than half of BSU’s study abroad students, of tours around Western Europe and Australia. This is not to imply that study abroad to Europe can’t challenge one’s cultural perspective or cause a student to reevaluate his American life, but we must consider that as far less than half of BSU’s study abroad students are experiencing “nontraditional locations” and cultures, BSU study abroad students on the whole are not becoming familiar with the largest parts of the world and the parts of it that are most different from America.

Coffin likens study abroad to studying another language, in that foreign language study teaches students more about English grammar and syntax: “When you’re in another culture, the questions you ask about that culture you then ask about your own culture. […] You begin to think ‘what about me?’.” Similarly, according to Nadine Dolby, “study abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself – particularly one’s own national identity – in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self” (150). Just as much as cultural awareness appears as a major purpose for studying abroad, so does reevaluation and readjustment of perspectives on American culture, but how much can students readjust their perspectives when they’re choosing to travel, in the overwhelmingly majority, to Western Europe, Canada and Australia, where the culture they’re interacting with
resembles American culture so closely? Considering as an example the European Union and its building of cultural and financial bridges all over Europe and the increased intra-European travel that has instigated, the more globalized the world becomes, the less and less we may be able to justify travel to English-speaking, western countries as “study abroad” experiences that open students’ eyes to new ways of living and viewing the world. Certainly, global awareness can increase because of travel to such similar cultures – such as in questioning American transportation systems, encountering language and diet differences, sensing Europeans’ views of Americans especially since the beginning of the Iraq war, discovering alternative approaches to familiar situations – but such cultural awareness may be less dramatic and noticeable than it would be for a student who traveled to Asia or Africa, places with cultures that have immediately noticeable differences from American culture. Travel to western nations will continue to be valuable on some level, but the more globalized the world becomes, the farther students will have to reach to achieve the perspective-changing cultural interactions they claim to desire of their study abroad programs – and therefore the more universities will have to ensure that those “nontraditional locations” are just as financially and practically available as the destinations of the western world.

Ball State is moving in the right direction by building new programs in more and more distant locations, but the emphasis must also come from parents, other administrators and the employers of the world: we should declare that tourist experiences and impressive photo albums may not always be the best indications of cultural interaction, and that perhaps study in unrecognizable, unfamiliar and uncommon destinations for tourists can be as rewarding or more rewarding as travel to Europe. And if society is able to conclude this, then study abroad programs must be able to react by ensuring that those more distant programs are available and
have the capability of accommodating more students. Moreover, study abroad programs can facilitate this change in society’s mindset by promoting Asian and African destinations more heavily than they do now and indicating the cultural interactions available in, for instance, Japan that aren’t available in London. If, in 10 years, the most popular destinations for American students are still the UK, Australia and Canada by such a wide margin, the cultural awareness of American students will be less broad and less extensive than it has the potential to be if study abroad programs and participants seek beyond the familiar and most tourist-friendly destinations of the world. Perhaps Gmelch’s students would have been less tempted to participate in “country-a-day tourism” had they been studying in India, where they may have had fewer tourist destinations they were compelled to visit and, therefore, they may have spent more time getting to know the culture they were immersed in.

A similar example at BSU involves Coffin’s Jamaica field study, which he describes as a program in which students encounter great cultural diversity. In this program, students travel to Jamaica for nearly a month and shadow Jamaican people struck by poverty for 24 hours a day some days; Coffin says the team generally avoids heavily touristed destinations and many of the students, by the end of the trip, are disgusted with how American tourists behave while abroad. He has seen that these students “are really changed” and that they are “better for it,” but this program had only 10 participants last school year, compared with the 74 students who went to London, the 63 who went to Australia or the 90 who went to Canada.

WHAT PROGRAMS HAIL BSU STUDENTS?

In the 2003-2004 school year, 74 of Ball State’s study abroad students participated in the London Centre, making it the second-most-popular program overall and the most popular
program that isn’t associated with a specific major or field of study (“Study Abroad Report” 1). (First place goes to a short-stay field study in Canada that 90 students participated in but was only open to students in the College of Architecture and Planning.) Next in line after the London Centre was the Australia Centre, which attracted 63 students – a solid 27 students ahead of the next most popular program (1). For each of these Ball State-sponsored programs, these students fly to the destination with a group of other Ball State students to take classes from a Ball State professor and to live in hotels, hostels or other living arrangements together. So, in effect, these programs create a cultural bubble that saves students from the necessity of interacting with Londoners in school or at home and robs them of that interaction at the same time. How can this type of program notably increase cultural awareness or allow students to readjust their cultural perspectives when the its format hinges on transplanting a Ball State classroom and creating an environment where the only cultural interaction students are likely to get will be interaction they must seek and initiate on their own? On the other hand, not only does the program offer a range of classes that the students can elect to take – including, this semester, European history, British literature, Fundamentals of human health and Theatre 100, a University Core Curriculum course – but it also requires registration in a cultural class that teaches about life in London. Coffin said the centre programs are designed “to get as much immersion as possible, and by that I mean rubbing shoulders with the Aussies and the Brits.” Still, the basic structure and philosophy of centre programs flies in the face of “immersion” and almost requires that students have a tourist experience by virtue of being isolated from the host culture.

With its 74 participants, the London Centre constituted almost 13% of all BSU study abroad last year. Clearly, the London Centre constitutes a significant portion of what study abroad means for Ball State, and as Ball State study abroad grows, the London Centre is
undoubtedly a large contributor to that – whether or not increased participation in the London Centre program translates to generally increased cultural awareness on Ball State’s campus. Ball State offers seven other center programs, besides the London and Australia Centres, all with the same philosophy of American teachers leading a group of American students on travels abroad, but most of those additional programs are run by study abroad consortia like AHA International and The Kentucky Institute for International Studies (KIIS). In total, 194 Ball State students – nearly 35% of all BSU study abroad students – participated in these center programs, or bubble programs, as they could be called, in the 2003-2004 academic year (1). The appeal of these programs most likely lies in students’ desires to visit the locations or in the promise that the study abroad experience will be comfortable in the English-speaking, American-classroom, mediated environment of the centre program rather than the immersion of exchange programs; however, we must also consider that because of the popularity of centre programs, they are advertised by the Center for International Programs most heavily and most prominently, so often these centre programs are the first or strongest suggestions that students hear about when they hear about study abroad. So, between the popularity of centre programs and the endorsement they get by the Center for International Programs, the bubble experience of such programs may become the definitive experience of Ball State study abroad.

Even so, the largest number of Ball State study abroad students – nearly half of the total, at 330 participants (3) – join field study programs, which are headed by a specific department at BSU and taught by BSU professors. The largest of which, as was mentioned before, is the architecture department’s Canada field trip (which brings to mind the tangential question of how “abroad” Canada really is). Other programs include an architecture adventure in Argentina, an Honors College trip to Rome, a telecommunications field study in Mexico, a counseling and
psychology study in South Africa and a family and consumer sciences program in London (one of six field studies held in the UK). All of these programs are BSU faculty-led and concentrate on specific classes in a specific field of study; almost all of them are also short-stay programs.

The "short stay" is becoming a major trend in higher-education study abroad: Ball State’s numbers match the national average of more than half of study abroad students choosing short-term study programs (Marklein par. 7). For short programs, a student studies abroad not for an academic year, not for a semester, but for a number of weeks – usually between two and eight. Shorter-term study abroad opportunities are gaining participation at Ball State every year while full-academic-year programs are quickly declining in popularity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Abroad</th>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Academic Year:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>2002-2003</td>
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<td>2003-2004</td>
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<td><strong>Single Semester:</strong></td>
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<td>2001-2002</td>
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<td>2002-2003</td>
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<td>2003-2004</td>
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<td><strong>Short Term/Summer:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>225</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>315</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>326</td>
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</table>

("Study Abroad Report" 3)
As the number of participants in full-year programs was cut almost in half from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004, the number of participants in short-term or summer programs increased by 11. The greatest increase from the year prior was in single-semester programs – which grew by 41 students – but the number of students choosing short term or summer programs still exceeds the number of students choosing single-semester programs by nearly 100.

While the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States created more concern for students studying abroad, as well as where they’re going and how long they’re staying, “most colleges [...] report] that the number of their students studying abroad has increased or stayed the same in the wake of September 11, although safety issues had persuaded some students not to participate” (par. 6). Indeed, at Ball State, the dramatic decline in year-long program participation did not occur in the academic year immediately following the September 11 attacks, which was also the year the war in Iraq was instigated, but in the year following that. Likewise, shorter programs did not incur such declines, nor did they incur proportionately similar increases that could not be explained by previously established increase trends, so the reason for the year-long program participation drop may have little or nothing to do with Americans’ safety abroad. Without more specific data on BSU students’ reasons for studying abroad, however, we cannot make any clear and certain rationale for the observed drops and spikes in student participation.

However, we can certainly note that one of the major appeals of short-stay programs is that they are generally cheaper, since students are not enrolling in a foreign university for a full semester of credit hours, and they do not have to spend as much on housing and other expenses. Short study programs are also often more focused on specific fields of study, especially in the hard sciences or other lab-based areas of study, like architecture and planning; they are, additionally, more feasible time-wise because they do not require students to leave schools,
homes, families and jobs for longer than a few weeks, and they often occur during summer or winter vacations. Overall, they are usually not as frightening to students without international experience as an exchange program would be. Undoubtedly, cultural exchange and interaction, increased insight and improved global perspective are all occurring within those two to eight weeks, but can we ever imagine that a short stay abroad offers the same kind of cultural awareness that a semester or, imagine it, a year of living in another culture?

The less time a study abroad student stays in another country, the more likely he is to have a tourist experience simply by virtue of how long he is abroad – if a student is in Paris for three weeks, he will visit the Eiffel Tower and the Lourve, he’ll take pictures of himself at the Arc de Triomphe and Notre Dame Cathedral; however, if the same student instead lived in Paris for a semester or two, he might see all of those things in the first few weeks and expand his horizons from there, visiting cities and countries around Paris, engaging in conversation with local people, making friends in the city and encountering some of the nuanced aspects of what it means to live, actually live, another way of life, rather than just pass by it glancing through a tour bus window. The instinct is to "get your money's worth" on a short-stay trip abroad – as Gmelch's students were doing on their six-week trip – by gathering as many photographs as possible of famous and respectable places, places that will make students seem like more cultured and wise human beings for having visited. Short-stay students have little likelihood of escaping the tourist experience because culture is not something that can be understood in a few short weeks of travel.

As Mary Beth Marklein stated in a USA Today article last February, “the definition [of study abroad] is expanding – and some people don’t like the direction it’s taking” (par. 6). The concern is that in such a short period of time the expected change in cultural perspective cannot
be cultivated, that in such a short period of time the study abroad participant is a tourist rather than a student. While length of program is clearly not the only cause of tourist experiences for students abroad, professors leading short-stay programs must pay careful attention to not allowing the short period of time to dictate what depth of cultural interaction the students have; professors must be aware that Europe can become, as one of Gmelch’s colleagues described it, “a big shopping mall in which to hang out, not a place to challenge one’s cultural categories” (qtd. in Gmelch 426).

Conversely, as Nancy Harris of Elon University notes, “If the only option were longer-term programs, many students probably wouldn’t go at all” and “even in a short time you can’t help but have your eyes opened a little bit” (qtd. in Marklein par. 13-14). But Dickinson College’s Brian Whalen disagrees: “Without ample time to put the experience in context, you’re really a tourist” (qtd. in Marklein par. 29). In Marklein’s discussion with students participating in a short field study in Belize, she found them excited about the cultural interactions they had experienced and insightful about why they found it important to study abroad, but she also found that their reflections on their studies in Belize mostly focused around themselves – how they applied what they’d learned to American life and culture, how they saw themselves as changed, how much fun they were having and how privileged they felt to be doing such a program. As Georgetown University study abroad director Michael Vande Berg commented, with short-stay programs “[w]hat we see are things that tend to confirm our pre-existing suppositions, so we come back with stereotypes confirmed” (qtd. in Marklein par. 12), and we come back with new views of ourselves, with inward-looking gazes – a common feature of tourist experiences.

Certainly, by focusing changes incurred by study abroad on the students’ selves and home culture, students may question American values and systems more than they might if their
focus throughout the study abroad experience were trained only on learning about and integrating with the culture they have traveled to. But although increased understanding of American sensibilities and fellow American students are important lessons for the study-abroad student to learn, are they the best lessons that study abroad can offer students?

For example, Ben Freinberg conducted a study on several undergraduates upon their return from various study abroad programs, and noticed many reactions to study abroad that were similar to this one, from Peter, who went to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho for 10 weeks to study and complete service projects with a group of his peers:

When asked what he had learned from his African experience, Peter used the first-person pronoun seven times, eliminating Africans: “I learned that I’m a risk taker, um, that I don’t put up with people’s bull […] That I can do anything that I put my mind to. […]”

Peter didn’t mention that Zimbabweans live in an impoverished dictatorship where 25% of the population is HIV positive, and thus they cannot do anything they put their minds to – a lesson he evidently didn’t learn. […] Students like Peter ignore the presence of real foreigners and fill their travel stories with images of personal growth […] and they] talk about interactions with outsiders only in vague abstractions, while expostulating brilliantly about the nuances of American students’ interactions with one another. (pars. 2-3, 12-14)

Freinberg’s observations do not necessarily indicate that students are refusing to change or increase their cultural awareness with short study abroad programs, but merely that those changes often mirror the changes tourists undergo, changes that are very self-focused. He further notes that “Students return from study-abroad programs having seen the world, but the world
they return to tell tales about is more often than not the world they already knew [...] where everything is already known, everyone speaks the same language and the outside world keeps its eyes on those of us who come from the center" (par. 16). Personal growth among students studying abroad is important, but cannot be the only change that study abroad students are undergoing, especially if that change is at the cost of greater cultural awareness.

Furthermore, Marklein suggests that short-study programs are "just a starting point" (par. 31) – a starting point for what? More travel, of course. But the question is: do these short-study programs, or any study abroad programs for that matter, encourage students to engage in conscientious, culturally aware future travel habits or adventurous, culturally blind, touristic future travel habits? It may be fairly safe to assume that a three-week field study in South America during Ball State’s winter break probably produces at least as many blind tourists as it does culturally aware travelers; I would guess that for as many students there are who are touched and changed by their experiences in such a short-stay program, there are many other students who simply found another way to spend their winter vacations.

Coffin seems to believe that a student can improve his cultural awareness in a short time, and indeed he can – to some degree – but to understand a culture, to truly see how and why a people lives as it does, one must be immersed in that culture, without the mediating artifices of many study abroad programs. Only by living, and possibly working, in a culture can one begin to claim that she has an understanding of it, and even then the foreigner would have to put much effort into not judging actions by the standards of the home country and not relying on the preferences of her primary culture. In other words, years upon years may not even be enough for one to truly claim understanding of a culture; such a claim also necessitates an open mind and spirit, a desire to surrender the native cultural instincts in favor of new ones. Consider, for
instance, how long an Asian immigrant or a Mexican immigrant can live in America before he begins to be accepted as American – it is likely, too, that he will always second guess certain traditions and he will always question why Americans do some things their way rather than the way he learned as a child. He will most likely always be clinging to the culture of his home country in a way that never allows him to truly understand or become part of the American culture. Certainly, the purpose of study abroad is not to relinquish the student's cultural identity in favor of another, but can we truly call it "cultural awareness" or "sensitivity to cultural differences" if students are coming back with tales of people "driving on the wrong side of the road," of "how strange the toilets were," of "road signs that were really different from normal ones," of any habit or custom that is typical and natural to the native population but strange and, therefore, not as good as the American way of doing things in the eyes of the study abroad student?

Just seeing the way another people lives is not the same as understanding it or becoming sensitive to it; this Americentric view of cultural differences invokes an imperialistic hierarchy that claims the students' home-country culture is superior to that of the countries awaiting their arrival. I take issue with the word "experience" in the context of "experience a culture" – a phrase so often found in study abroad marketing materials – because what does it mean to have "experienced" a culture? How can that be measured or estimated? What does that “experience” give to the traveler? A student can be exposed to a new culture, can encounter it, can discover or consider it, can realize it exists, but she may never truly "experience" life as a member of that culture. To be more aware of this foreign culture or to become sensitive to it she can certainly claim, but to experience or to understand it involves much deeper interaction with the culture than the majority of study abroad programs offer. Sometimes the short-stay programs create
more personal and intimate cultural interaction, but even that is defeated, to some extent, by the
minimal amount of time spent with the culture.

If any time abroad constitutes “international experience” and there are no qualifications
regarding what kind of experience study abroad entails, the message of study abroad directors
becomes "just get out of the country; just make sure you get some kind of 'international
experience' before you're out of college." With that attitude, and with the touristy tendencies of
some short-stay and centre-program students, the purpose of study abroad seems to be the
experience of walking on foreign soil, rather than of interacting in any real way with any cultural
differences between the home country and the destination.

And cultural awareness does not come from the experience of isolation within an
unfamiliar cultural environment that centre and field-study programs offer; it comes from
engaging with the environment and integrating oneself into it. So, an exchange program in
which a single student heads, alone, to another country, lives in a host home or apartment in this
new country, attends classes as an international student at a host-country university, grocery
shops, gets haircuts, goes on day trips, makes close friends, gets used to life in another country,
those are the programs that offer a true immersion experience in the culture being visited, an
experience stripped of the safety nets of American teachers or classmates or living arrangements,
stripped of the tourist elements of study abroad. But for BSU students, the option of the
American-bubble trip is nearly five times as popular, attracting almost 500% more students than
exchange programs that offer experiences much more accurately resembling cultural immersion.

Thirty-nine of Ball State’s 563 study abroad students last year chose such programs.
Thirty-nine. Compare that with the 194 students who chose center programs and the 330
students who participated in field studies, then consider if study abroad at Ball State is about
encouraging students to interact with foreign and dissimilar cultures or if study abroad at Ball State may be about checking off destinations from a list of international travel dreams.

I don't mean to imply that there is no value or opportunity for learning in center and field study environments, because that is entirely contrary to fact, but I do want to point out that a large number of students choose not to travel further than Canada or England, to stay longer than a few weeks, to immerse themselves in a foreign culture. For students with understandable and justifiable limitations – such as cost or academic schedules – short-stay programs and programs close to home are much more attractive than Asian or African exchange programs. However, the fact that our universities and study abroad offices are so concerned with increasing numbers, rather than increasing the quality of study abroad experiences, that they more heavily encourage short-stay and field study or center programs than they do exchange programs, shows a sort of surrender to the tourist-like desire to stay close to home both in distance and in culture. Perhaps if the Center for International Programs chose to advertise the benefits and activities of exchange programs as rigorously as it advertises some of its most popular center and field-study programs, it would see increased attendance in those less-cautious study abroad opportunities that would challenge students’ views more directly. If the Center considers such bubble programs to be providing sufficient "international awareness," it implies that students need not take the risks of longer or more challenging study abroad experiences and, it follows, students will be even less likely to volunteer for those more intimidating programs.

**HOW CAN THIS BE CHANGED?**

Tourists don't usually travel abroad to reevaluate their worldviews, but study abroad students can as long as the study abroad experience continues to be considered more than an
exotic trip and as long as face-to-face cultural interaction is a central part of the programs offered. To some extent, those changes can only happen in the structures of the study abroad programs, by creating more cultural integration in some of these bubble programs, for instance, but there are also ways that the Center can work against the tourist impulse before students even pack their bags.

Last year, Anastasia Kitsantas studied how students' goals affected their development of cross-cultural skills and global understanding while abroad. She based her study partly on the ideas laid forth in previous studies on the effects of goal setting, which explain that when students set goals, it "influences behavioral functioning by focusing attention and regulating expenditure of one's effort. [...] and] significantly enhances the participant's performance" (par. 5). Kitsantas then applied those theories of goal setting to the study abroad environment, testing students' goals for what they would gain during study abroad trips and comparing that to what they felt they actually did gain from studying abroad. She found that the variance from departure to return of students who had set goals regarding development of global understanding had been influenced by those goals in 16% of the cases (par. 20). In fact,

Specifically, 31% of the variance in students' cross-cultural skill development was explained by their goals to study abroad. The most potent predictor was students' goal to develop cross-cultural competence. [...] Correlations also indicated that students who reported they wanted to study abroad in order to improve their cross-cultural competence and because they had or were interested in developing competency in the subject matter taught, were more likely to report higher levels of cross-cultural skills and global understanding than those who did not. Interestingly, no significant correlations emerged between the students' goals
to join study abroad programs for social gathering reasons. (par. 24)

Therefore, encouraging students to set goals regarding increased global understanding and cultural competence may help students actually increase their skills in these areas and help them view their experiences as less like dream-come-true trips and more like chances to experience cultural diversity or to improve specific cross-cultural skills. Kitsantas recommended creating more comprehensive pre-departure preparation programs for study abroad students, programs that include goal-setting elements, but I would suggest that we can also introduce these culturally conscious goals through the advertising done for study abroad programs.

The first and most important step would be to decide and determine what programs are advertised rather than simply advertising whichever programs students like best; in other words, the Center for International Programs should push harder on the exchange programs and Far-East programs it offers, rather than consistently prioritizing the London and Australia Centres for no other reason than that they are the most popular destinations. For example, on the study abroad website, students can either take a somewhat lengthy quiz to determine what kind of study abroad experience would best suit them – a very helpful tool, which asks questions about duration of stay, living arrangements, comfort with unfamiliar cultural traditions, classroom preferences and costs, among other factors that set apart centre programs, exchange programs and field study programs – or students can save time by visiting the “Top 15 Locations” page, on which the first destinations to appear are the London and Australia Centres, which sit among 11 other western-country programs, interrupted by only four other options, two of which are in South America and the other two are umbrella descriptions of programs that offer multiple destinations. If the Center for International Programs gives “nontraditional locations” or exchange programs a more prominent place on the website, or if the Center advertises the
benefits and drawbacks of each of its three kinds of programs in a more specific and concrete way, students would be better able to determine the differences between the London Centre and a year of studying without any other Americans at a university in Chile, Costa Rica, Thailand or Japan.

Beyond that, the verbiage of study abroad marketing materials could be modified to downplay the tourist aspects of studying abroad and increase discussion of the cultural interaction available while abroad. This could increase expectation of – or setting goals for – cultural awareness and global consciousness without creating any new programs or forcing students into setting specific goals; instead, using the power of suggestion that is so strong in advertising, the Center can encourage students to view study abroad a certain way and to accordingly set personal goals for participating in study abroad that focus on cultural awareness and increased global consciousness.

To illustrate, Coffin attributes the popularity of the London Centre to the fact that [Students want] the adventure of getting out of Muncie. You’re young and you want to see another part of the world. It’s a romantic notion. [...] The London Centre is] just a stone’s throw away from all of Europe. [...] The students know we encourage that kind of travel.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Coffin’s description of why students study abroad echoes the perk and exoticisation of descriptions that appear in the world of tour book writing. For example, in a vacation guide for American Express Vacations in Europe, the sections on London all emphasize London’s convenient proximity to many other European destinations, just as Coffin does: “London is very accessible” (10) and “London may very well be one of the hippest, hottest cities in Europe. … Choose a hotel in a district you fancy, but remember, no matter where you stay in
London, chances are you can reach all the attractions you want to see” (12). The London Centre is the second-most popular Ball State study abroad program, and when study abroad promotions speak of their locations in the same ways that tour books speak of them – with the same tone and style, the same use of second person, as well as the same emphases on the “important” aspects of the destination, like proximity to other destinations – it’s no wonder that more and more students are being enticed to study abroad. As Coffin said, “We tell them about the wonderful places they can go – I mean, we feed into the romantic ideals, too.”

But despite the increased numbers such advertising may bring in, the Center must be cautious that it is not creating a view of study abroad as an opportunity to live out tourist goals with little or no interest in foreign customs or lifestyles, which could increase the possibility that BSU students, like Gmelch’s students, would scatter across Europe taking in little more than the views from train stations and tourist hot spots. With more careful description of the program’s benefits, students may be more likely to set cultural-awareness goals on their own. Coffin himself discusses the London Centre with many potential study abroad students, likely using much of the same language he used in our interview, and explains that marketing for BSU’s study abroad programs consists mainly of determining why students might not go abroad and finding rebuttals to those concerns. As has been discussed at length in the previous sections, students choose study in the locations they do for a variety of reasons, but often these promotional materials are the students’ introductions to the existence of the study abroad programs available, and thereby the instigators of students’ primary motivations for actually visiting such places. Much as the tour book is sometimes a tourist’s next step after dreaming of traveling to a destination, the promotional materials for study abroad are often how students begin to decide that they will travel abroad, so the language of these materials may affect their
decisions significantly.

The tour-book-style language in which Coffin describes the London Centre appears also in the description of it on the BSU study abroad website:

The London Centre is the perfect choice for students [who] want to experience Europe in a structured manner. A Ball State professor accompanies students and teaches several classes. Students live together in a London hotel, and are only a ten-minute tube ride from such sites as the London Tower and Big Ben. ... With the central hub of London, students are also free to travel on the weekends to countries such as Germany, Ireland, and France. (par. 2)

The focus remains on the benefits of the location as an easy-access site for the rest of Europe and there is absolutely no discussion of the academic, cultural awareness or future benefits of such a program: this description advertises a European adventure, not a culture exchange.

Another example of such travel-book-like presentation of BSU study abroad opportunities is the promotional video developed in 2001 that is sometimes shown to classes in order to pique students' interest in studying abroad. The video lists only a handful of locations – Spain, Australia, Malta, Russia, Germany, Italy, all western destinations – rather than the full list of offerings that Ball State has available, and pairs that list with upbeat, exciting music and a photo montage of famous sites and impressive landscapes and BSU students having the times of their lives. No one studies in this video, and hardly anyone interacts with a native of the host country or participates in host-country traditions. As Coffin explained regarding his presentations to potential study abroad students, this video also caters simply to the concerns of students – especially lack of proficiency in a language, the financial burden and the extra time that studying abroad could add to the college career – rather than turning the video's focus on the
increased understanding of the world that can be gained by studying abroad or the career benefits of knowing how to move and exist in a culture unlike one's own. The video consists almost entirely, aside from peppy music and photo montages, of personal accounts by BSU students of their travels abroad, and they're saying things like "trips away from campus were wonderful" and "yes, there are koalas in Australia" and "I just wanted the experience"; by and large, they're saying things that short-stay tourists could also have said about the destinations. The video ends with a student delivering the line: "With Ball State University and a little work from yourself, you can go just about anywhere you want to go," a tagline that Ball State now shares with MasterCard's TV commercials – study abroad will take you "everywhere you want to be," whether or not you will learn anything while you're there. Such a flippant approach to study abroad may help in recruiting students who are less dedicated to seeking cultural interaction in their studies abroad, but overall may detriment study abroad by cheapening the idea of it.

So if the Center for International Programs, rather than allowing previous students' preferences to dictate which programs are most and best advertised, takes a more proactive approach in better advertising the more challenging, if more intimidating, exchange programs that engage students in more intense cultural questioning, students may begin to seriously view study abroad not as a trip but as a lesson, as an opportunity for encounters with foreign people, places and customs. With increased emphasis on this purpose for study abroad, students may become more likely to set personal goals that suit this intention and, therefore, gain greater cultural awareness and be more willing to question their place in the world as Americans.

The Center for International Programs does, however, distribute a few pamphlets that promote study abroad in more appropriate ways. For instance, two pamphlets that advertise the general purpose of ISEP's programs focus less on the tourist visitation or personal growth that
study abroad allows, and instead focus on the employability of students with study abroad experience. The pamphlets "Study Psychology Abroad" and "Study Business Abroad" have as their first words "study," rather than "explore" or "discover," which immediately trains the student reader's focus on study and educational growth, rather than tourist interests. The "Study Business Abroad" pamphlet continues by explaining that:

- Study abroad shows that you seek challenges and are resourceful and adaptable.
- It demonstrates that you know about other cultures and are able to communicate and negotiate with them – vital qualifications in a global economy. […]
- ISEP’s immersion experience will teach you how people from other cultures solve problems and think about the issues they – and you – will face after you graduate.
- As you interact with other students, you will begin building an international network of friends and contacts.

The pamphlet is clear and specific about the outcomes students should be interested in obtaining – challenge-seeking, resourcefulness, adaptability, cross-cultural communication skills – and about what students will encounter in the abroad experience – interaction with foreign students and how they view the world. This text notes not only what students should be learning abroad, but also how that learning can or will occur, which helps those students create a concrete and reasonable expectation for the cultural interactions they will have abroad. Additionally, the pamphlet focuses on ISEP’s immersion programs and classes conducted in the host-country language, so that students will be attracted to the most intense cultural-interaction programs, rather than the easiest. The pamphlet's biggest advantages over some of Ball State's other marketing materials, like the study abroad video, is that it is extremely clear and specific as well as focused on cultural interaction, rather than the fun that students have abroad or how cost-
effective the programs are — and there is no tourist-board language about the world awaiting or the beauty of the destinations.

The ISEP pamphlet, however, is for BSU consortia programs and is not made by and for Ball State students alone; the Center for International Programs distributes another good example with its Department of Anthropology Field Study of the Indians of Arizona and New Mexico flyer — of course, this isn’t a study abroad experience, it’s a domestic study experience, but the flyer has several aspects of responsible study abroad advertising. Like the “Study Business Abroad” pamphlet, this flyer is clear and specific about the structure and function of the program, and it leaves out any discussion of personal growth; in fact, the focus of the flyer is on the people that students will be studying and the cultures students will learn about. For example, the flyer describes “The sessions [which] will be structured to elicit information and attitudes on such problems as education, employment, energy development, health, religion, lifestyle aspirations, and the arts” and the flyer states “the goal of sensitizing students to the issues currently affecting the American Indian.” The flyer is further specific about the course requirements, exact costs, assignment expectations and accommodations, which serves to paint for the student an accurate image of what the study experience entails.

If more study abroad marketing materials – especially for programs in nontraditional locations – were as clear and specific as these printed materials, students could be better informed about what study abroad would be teaching them, how they would learn these lessons and how they should approach their study abroad experiences. This change in the marketing materials would also likely increase educational interest in these programs, thereby decreasing tourist interest, and might even improve participation numbers for nontraditional locations and parent approval of nontraditional locations, perhaps increasing overall study abroad participation.
Such improvements are speculative, but no detriment can come from creating more specific, clear and accurate study abroad marketing materials, which would very likely create more prepared and aware study abroad students who have set more responsible goals for their study abroad experiences. And while Ball State is doing this to some degree with a few of its study abroad marketing materials, the only places this more responsible advertising occurs are print publications – the publications that reach the fewest number of students and cater largely to students who have already decided to study abroad in a specific location or with a specific program – rather than the online and multimedia marketing materials, which spark the most initial interest in study abroad. If Ball State can adopt these more responsible practices to its study abroad marketing materials across the board, the university may begin to see positive changes in the quality of students’ experiences abroad.

Additionally, Ball State is working toward improving the cultural interactions built into its programs in other ways, Coffin mentioned, especially with the Australia Centre, in which he is working with partner organizations overseas to set up a community service component to the program. With this change to the program, students will be required as a part of the Australia Centre curriculum to complete community service while abroad, thereby giving them greater personal interaction with the people and culture of the destination and thereby deflating the Centre bubble at least a little. Such drastic changes, along with, perhaps, better preparation before leaving as Kitsantas recommended and more responsible marketing of study abroad programs could lead not only to increased tolerance and change in BSU students who go abroad, but also continually increasing numbers of students who choose to study abroad.

Still, no matter what changes occur in the way study abroad is marketed, we must pay more attention to where students are going, what programs students are participating in and why
those are the most attractive options to students studying abroad, because by letting study abroad go unfettered and unanalyzed, unmeasured and uncriticised, we run the risk of allowing study abroad students to become the new wave of mass tourists, rather than the new wave of culturally conscious adults who know and appreciate the world outside of America. If this world is awaiting, the Ball State Center for International Programs and comparable organizations at other universities must take on the responsibility of helping their students find the best opportunities available in that world, rather than allowing the students to consume it blindly.
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