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Mentoring Undergraduate Research through a South Africa Study Abroad Program

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In 2015-2016, over 325,000 U.S. students participated in study abroad programs, of which over 50% were short-term (Association of International Educators, 2016). Short-term refers to a program lasting 8 weeks or less. Study abroad programs have increasingly become recognized as vital college education experiences that address numerous High Impact Practices (HIPs) including fostering learning communities, engaging in collaborative assignments and projects, participating in diversity/global learning and service/community-based learning, and albeit more rarely, engaging in undergraduate research (Kuh, 2008; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017). We argue that this latter HIP is vital to incorporate into study abroad because of its immense benefits for short and long-term student outcomes – particularly for undergraduate and underrepresented college students (Giedt, Gokcek, & Ghosh, 2015). We define research as activities involving systematic methods to uncover data and advance knowledge (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Depending on the student's particular discipline and project, the research activities can include qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches, and range from survey and interview to library and archival activities.

The benefits of research participation for undergraduate students are well documented (Komarraju, Musulkin, Bhattachary, 2010; Kuh, 2008; Lopatto, 2010; Streitwieser, 2009). Research participation facilitates academic and social integration, allows for experiential, active learning, augments cognitive and personal skill development, develops self-awareness, encourages active civil engagement, prepares students for graduate school, and helps students identify and solidify career paths (Bauer & Bennett, 2003; Lopatto, 2009, 2010; Streitwieser, 2009). Some of the specific skills gained through research include critical thinking, study design/methodology, data management, computer literacy, communication, and interpersonal relationships (Grossman, Patel, & Drinkwater, 2010; Lopatto, 2009). Students who participate in study abroad programs containing research rate those components higher than any other program elements (Solís, Price, & de Newbill, 2015).

The gains associated with research are especially pronounced for students from racial/ethnic groups that are underrepresented in university settings, including African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin students (Castillo & Estudillo, 2015; Hurtado, Eagan, Tran, Newman, Chang, & Velasco, 2011; John & Stage, 2014). Facilitating research experiences among underrepresented students is important because compared to European/white students, they are at greater risk for stressors that can lead to dropout and adverse academic outcomes. The four-year graduation rates for bachelor's degrees are approximately 45% for European/white, 30% for Hispanic/Latin, and 20% for African American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Common issues facing underrepresented students include lack of supportive student-faculty relationships, low self-esteem, and low integration in campus life (Fischer, 2007; Rice, Lopez, Richardson & Stinson,

2013). Participation in research helps combat the issues that can adversely impact retention rates for these students (Summers & Hrabowski, 2006).

The integration of research into study abroad programs is beneficial for a number of reasons. First, study abroad is not limited to only the highest achieving students, which means students from a variety of academic backgrounds gain exposure to and develop skills in research when it is integrated into the program (Streitwieser & Leephaibul, 2007). The study abroad-research integration also gets students from diverse backgrounds engaged in a High Impact Practice (i.e., research) for which they might not otherwise be involved, thereby promoting “deep” learning and improving retention and graduation rates (Kuh, 2008; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017). Second, students who participate in study abroad often apply for scholarships to fund the trip; the integration of research exponentially grows the number of awards for which they are eligible. The procurement of research awards not only eases students’ financial burdens, it also enables them to demonstrate on their curriculum vitae (CV) and to graduate admissions committees that they have been successful in securing funding for their work. Third, the integration of research into study abroad promotes collaborations that might not otherwise have been possible. For example, students may engage in cross-disciplinary work as they conduct collaborative research with other students in the program. They also work intensively with faculty mentors to refine and complete their projects. Finally, by incorporating research, students are able to see themselves as active participants in the study abroad program and engage in critical self-reflection about their roles in the world.

In this paper, we discuss our experience implementing an interdisciplinary, research-based, short-term study abroad program in South Africa. A majority of the program participants are first-generation, underrepresented college students who have never traveled outside the country or state. The benefits students ascertain from undergraduate research and study abroad programs are plentiful yet the specific challenges and opportunities that result from merging these two domains are not well documented (Shanahan, Ackley-Holbrook, Hall, Stewart & Walkington, 2015). In the sections that follow, we review recruitment and program implementation, and address challenges associated with funding, background knowledge, constraints, and expectations. We then discuss opportunities related to cultural competencies, professional growth, and identity development. We incorporate student perspectives throughout, including quotes from first-generation, underrepresented and/or ethnically diverse students which make up the majority of our program participants. Scholars have noted a particular dearth of research representing the voices of ethnic minority study abroad participants (Lee & Green, 2016), which we attempt to address as much as possible. We begin with an overview of our program.

Program Overview

This program was founded by Dr. Kelly Campbell (Department of Psychology) and Dr. Tiffany F. Jones (Department of History) at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The interdisciplinary collaboration between professors was formed as a result of their mutual participation in an African Task Force Initiative on campus and with the intent to promote high impact teaching practices, interdisciplinary research, and global awareness among students. South Africa was selected as the location because Dr. Jones is originally from the country and her program of research is focused on its history. Dr. Campbell teaches a large, general education racism course and South Africa’s legacy of apartheid made the location an ideal instructional setting. Despite the popularity of study abroad programs for U.S. students, fewer than 5% of students travel to African countries and less than 2% visit South Africa (Institute of International Education, 2017; Association of International Educators, 2016), reinforcing the program’s importance.

South Africa has a history that offers opportunities for intense engagement with issues of race, class, and identity. It is a multicultural country with a current population of over 57 million, eleven official languages, and one of the continent's strongest economies (Statistics South Africa, 2018). The wealth of the country, however, is intensely divided and there is a palpable division between the rich and the poor. The racial segregationist system that was initiated during the colonial years and reinforced in 1948 by the apartheid government, ensured that the majority black population and their Asian (including Indian) and colored (indigenous and "mixed race") counterparts, were relegated to the highly physical and low wage employment sectors. Despite the end of apartheid and the election of the African National Congress in 1994, inequality has yet to be fully redressed. The country is also ecologically diverse, with Cape Town being a cosmopolitan city with a Mediterranean climate, whereas Johannesburg and surrounding areas are more populated and industrially focused.

While in the program, approximately 10-20 students study during the first part of the U.S. summer break (winter for South Africa) at the University of Cape Town, which is the leading university on the African continent. In order to effectively facilitate the program, the ratio of students for a research-intensive program should be kept as low as possible, with a maximum of 10 students to 1 faculty member. The more students involved in the program, however, the lower the cost overall and the more financial benefit for the South African partners. Thus, having less than 10 students per faculty member is usually not feasible. Classes are held by the professors in university classrooms, and research is usually conducted by students on the university campus, in libraries or archives, during leisure time, and/or on excursions, depending on the course for which they sign up. In order to maximize the time in South Africa, part of the students' curriculum is offered online (e.g., watching taped lectures) and research is evaluated upon return to the U.S.

The students spend a total of 2.5 weeks in Cape Town and then travel to Johannesburg for the final week. Throughout this time, they are enrolled in any combination of three courses: 1) Rise, Decline and Legacy of Apartheid South Africa, a course that examines South Africa's history from 1948 to the present, 2) Race and Racism, an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural course that examines the concepts and theories of race, ethnicity, prejudice, and racism, and 3) Independent Study in History or Psychology, a course in which students conduct research under the supervision of one of the two faculty members. Although the courses are housed in two social science departments, students from all majors are eligible to enroll in the program; faculty work with Chairs from all departments to ensure the work completed in the courses counts towards the student's major or as electives, with Race and Racism fulfilling a general education requirement. The program is open to graduate students as well. In addition to completing coursework and research projects on the trip, students visit important historical sites that complement the course material including Robben Island, the Victor Verster Prison where Nelson Mandela lived prior to release, the Cradle of Humankind (birth of humanity), the District Six Museum (site of forcible removal during apartheid), the Slave Lodge, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, Constitution Hill (and the former prison complex), Apartheid Museum, and SOWETO (township).

Research is an important component in each of the courses and the program as a whole. Preparation typically begins before leaving for South Africa because students work with the professors to define their project topics and search for relevant academic sources. The research included in our program involves participation in existing faculty-led projects and/or carefully constructed individualized student research based on their interests and career goals. This means that multiple research projects can take place at the same time throughout the study abroad program. Students can engage in research activities that include, but are not limited to, oral histories, interviews, surveys, and archival projects. The research, however, does not include work-study, internship opportunities, or volunteer work, all of which require much more preparation and practicum training. Research projects, on the other hand can be more clearly mitigated and reviewed

through close supervision by professors, and students can begin the process of self-analysis and ethical reflection. As one student on our study abroad program, Alexis Butts, noted, “The research component of the trip was very useful as being an exercise to choose a research topic and write a long form paper. The paper was the first, I think, long form paper that I wrote with full control over the subject and timeline. Having this amount of control was a good experience to really get immersed into a topic of my own choosing.”

Other vital parts of the program that assist with the research component, are the requirements that students attend classes, keep a journal, and attend group debriefing or decompression sessions. As Tiessen and Kumar (2013) noted, “a journal forms an important document through which students grapple with their own positionality and identity, and where their own preconceived notions about the ‘other’ emerge unfiltered” (p. 427). Class lectures and debriefing sessions also serve as vital components in which outings, readings, experiences, and research findings can be discussed. Students are encouraged to analyze and reflect on their positionality and these become important avenues through which professors can help students deconstruct their views and fully understand the impact of their experiences and research.

Recruitment and Implementation

Students are recruited into the program using a variety of methods. The entire student body is emailed with information about the trip, information sessions are regularly offered, posters are placed around the campus and a YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2PcDSGUVFk>) is used for promotion. One of the most persuasive factors attracting students, beyond the common stereotypical notions associated with Africa, is the opportunity for research built into the trip. Not only is student research actively integrated into the program in course assignments, but some students are offered extracurricular paid archival research opportunities using faculty grants and/or professional development funds, which eases their financial concerns.

A pre-departure orientation session is offered wherein students obtain an overview of the trip and safety concerns. While an important component for the university risk assessment office, the orientation does not fully prepare students for understanding the country or their complex standing as a western traveler in an inequitable world. Students also come from different backgrounds and life experiences. It is difficult to address all that they may encounter in a group orientation session. It is in the pre-trip interactions with professors, research project discussions, and online homework required of students in the weeks before the trip where they begin the process of self-reflection and academic analysis. Students start learning ethical behavior by earning their Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certificates and secure, or at least participate in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process for their research.

Once in South Africa, students who enroll in Dr. Campbell’s courses begin collecting survey and interview data from South African citizens. By this stage, they have been trained on research ethics and protocol, including the informed consent process. Prior to engaging in the study, participants are notified that they may skip any survey question and/or stop the interview at any time. They are also informed that some of the questions will pertain to sensitive information (e.g., HIV status) and that their responses will be kept confidential. The professor works one-on-one with students to develop projects based on their unique interests and graduate school or career goals. Sample topics from previous years include: 1) The Meaning of Marriage in South Africa, 2) Infidelity and HIV, 3) Racism, Forgiveness, and Mental Health, 4) HIV Status and Subjective Quality of Life, and 5) Discrimination, Health, and Religiosity. Students approach people in public settings (e.g., shopping areas and cafés) to request their participation. For safety reasons, students are instructed to work in pairs or groups; they are not allowed to be on their own during free time unless they are in protected areas such as

the campus dorms. Individuals are offered a bag of small gifts (e.g., pens, candies, pins) as an incentive to participate in the research. After collecting data using paper surveys, the students enter their responses into an online platform that is stored on Qualtrics.com. Because survey items remain the same each year, students have access to a dataset with hundreds of participants, should they wish to complete quantitative analyses. At the end of their study abroad trip, students submit a culminating empirical paper and most present their projects at professional conferences. Several have earned awards for their work including First Place, Third Place, and Honorable Mention in the International Psychology (Division 52) Student Poster Competitions of the Western Psychological Association.

Students who enroll in Dr. Jones' courses, conduct qualitative library or archival research with the aim to either contribute to an existing faculty-led research project, or conduct their own unique research project aimed for professional conference presentations and/or publication in undergraduate research journals. Example projects include: 1) Responses by Local Communities to Global Neoliberal Economic Policies, 2) Changes in Public History Sites and Museums in South Africa, 3) History of Mental Health Practices, 4) Segregationism and Death Practices, and 5) Business Practices and Apartheid. Upon completion, many of the students present their works at undergraduate or graduate student conferences or have their papers published in student journals, such as the CSUSB history department's undergraduate journal, *History in the Making* (see Butts, 2015; Castro & Tate, 2017; Garcia-Barron 2015a; Garcia-Barron 2015b). Some have used their research in their future graduate studies.

The program is administratively supported by the campus' Center for International Studies & Programs which focuses on internationalization and the Office of Student Research that actively works to encourage faculty and student research in a collaborative manner. Moreover, the administration of the CSUSB campus, including the President and Dean's offices, offer grants to every student participating in study abroad programs. An institutional culture that supports research and study abroad has been a vital component in the success of our program.

Challenges

Despite having strong institutional support, we encounter significant challenges for our program, including funding, inadequate background knowledge, and students' perceived constraints and expectations. Arguably, the biggest challenge for our study abroad recruitment is lack of funding, so we begin with this point.

Funding

California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) is located in one of the most economically depressed regions of the U.S. The city of San Bernardino has a poverty rate of approximately 32% and a high school graduation rate of 68% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; 2017). In 2012, the city filed for bankruptcy. Despite these challenges, the university has thrived. The university services over 20,000 students each year and the research conducted at CSUSB greatly impacts their academic trajectory, especially because the university is a Hispanic Serving Institution with a majority of first generation college students (80% of first time freshmen), women (62%), and ethnic minorities (70%) who are reliant on financial aid (78%) (Integrated Postsecondary Education DataSystem, 2017). However, most students find it very difficult to afford the South Africa program. As one of our participants Tanisha Flowers noted, "Barriers I experienced were finances and time; it was a major concern. In leaving to go on a month-long trip, I would have had to take time off from work, and I didn't have vacation time."

One of the ways we overcome this barrier is to begin recruiting students early in the academic year. As such, they can apply for the myriad of scholarships available to fund their study abroad trip.

Because our program includes a research component, they qualify for additional awards. It is possible, with enough advance planning and effort, to have the entire trip funded through internal awards. Students are also advised to use InfoEd's SPIN database to locate thousands of external award opportunities that exist for study abroad trips. We have been very successful with these strategies. Nearly all the students who have participated in our study abroad program have secured at least one award. Nonetheless, the grants available do not supplement the potential loss of income during the weeks abroad and the program can still be expensive for students. Some of the awards are given only once the student concludes the trip. Thus, it is often difficult for them to afford the airfare up front or have enough spending money throughout the program.

Inadequate Background Knowledge

Only 5-10% of the students who have participated in our program have taken courses or read peer-reviewed material related to South Africa or Africa in general prior to the trip. What little knowledge they do have is commonly obtained from the media that bombards people with images of Africa as a homogeneous, static, and helpless continent filled with exotic inhabitants and animals, caught in war and poverty, but nevertheless offering an opportunity to explore one's own place in the world (Keim, 2017). Given students' lack of information about South African issues, it can be difficult for them to develop effective and realistic research projects without considerable guidance from the professors. Often, students approach the professors with ideas that would be unethical or impossible to research without proper training. For instance, one student planned to interview adolescents whose parents were HIV positive or had passed away from AIDS. Since the interviewees would not be 18 years or older as per IRB requirements and she had limited training and experience dealing with this population, her project would not have been feasible. Thus, helping students come up with and refine their topics can be time consuming. Project topics must be clearly defined months before the trip for IRB and scholarship/grant due dates.

Paola (2005) investigated study abroad in South Africa specifically and found students were hesitant to choose it as a location because of misinformation and lack of knowledge about its status as a developed and developing nation. It is therefore not surprising that the traditional locations for American undergraduates who choose to study abroad have always been and continue to be Western Europe, with the United Kingdom being the most popular (Institute for International Education, 2015). As one student, Alma Lilia Jiménez, who wanted to join the program but did not, stated: "my [immediate] family was not very supportive of me going to South Africa, my parents didn't think it was safe or productive to my future. My extended family (who are actually my future in-laws) who were willing to pay for my plane ticket for London Abroad, were more unwilling to pay for the tickets to South Africa because of the price and they too, did not see the point."

The most relevant factors influencing the choice to study abroad in South Africa include: prior academic coursework in African studies at the home institution, perceiving it as a destination that would offer unique cultural learning and personal enjoyment opportunities, and being able to communicate with people and conduct one's studies in English (Paola, 2005). In her interviews with study abroad students who visited Cape Town, Mathers (2004) reported a recurring theme that students indicated that "South Africa is not Africa" (p. 9). A variety of stereotypes underlain this view including expectations they would encounter an all-black, rural, poor, and primitive society. One of our students, Blanca Garcia-Barron (2015a), wrote in an article she later published, "I did not feel like I was in 'Africa.' That thought made me realize that I had assumptions that I did not want to admit to myself" (p. 286).

Perceived Constraints and Expectations

With limited background knowledge, students often approach the study abroad program to South Africa tentatively. In general, the idea of travelling to another country is something that has not been considered, and most of our students have never left the U.S. or even the local geographic region. For first-generation, African-American and Hispanic/Latin students this hesitance is heightened. As Cole (1991) and more recently, Burr (2005) have pointed out, students with minority backgrounds often feel that the program is not meant for them. Cole (1991) highlighted four barriers facing African American women in particular when engaging in international programs: faculty and staff who encourage only the “best” students to partake, financial constraints which supersede those of their white peers, family and community concerns about places they have never visited or know much about, and fear of encountering new forms of racism overseas. For first-generation students, who already face challenges attending college, “a supplementary education experience may represent an additional departure from the values and behaviors of their friends and families” and is not seen as integral to their career objectives (Andriano, 2010, p. 41). Indeed, participation rates among Hispanic/Latin, African-American, Asian, and American Indian students in study abroad programs have been considerably low, with Euro/white students in 2017 making up 71.6% of participants in study abroad programs from the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2017).

The location of the program in South Africa, in particular, plays an important role in the difficulty of student recruitment. Not only does the negative portrayal of African countries in the media lead students to fear travelling there, the far distance from the U.S. and the expectation that they conduct research also increases parents’ and students’ insecurities. There is a perception that visiting and researching in an African country is far more dangerous and requires more preparation, such as health checks, documentation, and equipment, than a country in Europe. Moreover, many students worry that they do not have the skills needed or will be safe enough to conduct the required research. Even after students decide to partake in the program, their participation in pre-departure orientation sessions that address risks and dangers can precipitate these views in that students and parents are merely told about their need for security (Heron, 2005).

After arrival, students, particularly those with limited background knowledge, experience considerable culture shock, and there are challenges to ensuring that they adjust appropriately to their environment. Not only do students have to learn how to live closely with each other, preparation must be made so that students are aware of issues such as jet lag, nutrition and hydration, budgeting, and importantly, their role in managing stereotypes of both Americans and South Africans. They must quickly develop cultural awareness. It is sometimes difficult to ensure that students understand the local idiosyncrasies and implications of their actions. One example is the desire to take pictures of local children or people without their permission. In an increasingly public social media landscape that allows for easy perpetuation of stereotypes, it is important for students to fully understand the effects of these pictures in the larger socio-political context. Many students have preconceived stereotypical notions about Africa that they want to highlight, often for their friends and family back home. These are not necessarily negative portrayals, but the limited opportunity for explanation and analysis on a social media site does not always lend itself to the complexities of the students’ experiences.

Opportunities

The challenges mentioned above, nonetheless offer opportunities for students to have a more in-depth, and far-ranging experience related to the study abroad program than if research were not expected. Because they focus their efforts on obtaining internal and external funding, they begin researching issues related to South Africa, thinking about their reasons for participating in the trip, and having a more active role in the program than if they were passive participants. Here, we discuss opportunities related to cultural competencies, professional development, and identity development.

Developing Cultural Competencies

One of the core goals for many study abroad programs is to foster intercultural competency and encourage students to become global citizens (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006). Intercultural competence and global citizenship refer to understanding cultural norms and using that knowledge to effectively communicate in intercultural settings (Deardorff, 2008). By incorporating a research agenda into the program, we seek to nurture what Killick (2015) described as the “global self,” which goes beyond the simple “global citizen” (p. 5). Individuals with a global self are self-reflective, active participants in the world; they take the knowledge gained through their international experiences beyond their studies and apply it in their daily lives. One of our students, Gino Howard, noted “The most challenging parts of the trip were the historical and current context of society. The rich, deep, and painful history in South Africa was difficult at many times because of the experience of the people. Some people were in poor physical and psychological states especially with the prevalence of homelessness and need for jobs. Hearing stories first hand and experiencing the history through museums and valuable lecture time was eye opening and, in some cases, psychologically/emotionally taxing.”

One of our goals with the program is to encourage students to consider their relationships with others including the influence of global tensions and inequities (Killick, 2015). Research activities, in conjunction with assignments and in-class discussions, offer a process whereby students can examine their roles in a safe yet productive environment. Students are assigned articles by the professors that challenge their passive position in study abroad. Articles by Enevoldsen (2003) and Ramchander (2007) discuss ethical considerations of cultural tourism and raise questions about the gaze that students may have during their encounters. One of our students, Blanca Garcia-Barron (2015a), explained an encounter during the program:

“Walking throughout the Soweto township arose conflicting feelings. In one sense, I became aware of the status of my own privilege. Within that awareness, I also realized that I was not a traveler here, but a tourist. It felt exploitative to walk around a neighborhood just so that I could see the conditions they live in. It felt exploitative because simply becoming aware of these conditions is not enough to change them. I can feel guilty and sad all day, but not being active in any small way cannot justify those feelings.”

During a short-term study abroad program in particular, the focus on critical analysis of one’s position is important, as it avoids the potential for destructive interventionism and deconstructs the western-centric gaze, enabling students to respectfully engage with the history and people of the region.

Once research ensues, not only do students interact with and learn from the local people, they also think about their positions in the country and invite opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. One student, Natalie Moreno, described the impact of research on intercultural competency: “[It] was definitely a learning experience, however the most helpful part of my learning was talking to the residents in South Africa. I was involved in a research group that had to talk to the residents and as I interviewed them, I gained lots of wonderful input beyond the research interview questions.” The research projects situate students within the country much more than the average tourist and offer unique opportunities for students to learn about themselves and South

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Africa. The interviews they conduct with local residents help dispel some of the misinformation related to South Africa. The supplemental book assignments, which are read during the study abroad, similarly provide students with accurate information about the country (e.g., *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane, *A Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela). One of our students, Diana Tuttle, described her reaction to an assigned reading:

[We] discussed K boy today in class. As hard as I tried, I was not able to hold back the tears. I felt so selfish to cry because of how I felt after reading the book. I will never know the hardships that K boy experienced during that era. I cry for them and because I am sad. But, I will never feel or experience their sadness. Hardest book I've ever read. I wanted to say, while I had all the school supplies a child could wish for, [K boy] had a broken slate. While I played on a beautiful yard full of grass, he played on dirty rocky streets and fields and trash dumps. While I had new clothes, he wore his father's old t-shirt to school. While I slept in my own comfortable bed in my own room, he slept on a concrete floor with cardboard and newspapers as blankets. While I had a clean bathroom to bathe in, he went to school dirty, sharing a single family washcloth to wipe his face. While I had three meals a day, he hardly ate. While I celebrated Christmas, he did not. While I joyfully played as a child, he scoured the streets for food. While I was protected by my parents, he protected his siblings and mother. [These are] two lives during the same time period, yet so drastically different.

The difficulty of some of the subject matter and experiences students feel during the trip, offers opportunity for self-reflection. In studying oppressive history, one can easily feel debilitated and disillusioned, especially when poverty and racism are still prominent. However, the research component is an important means to ensure that students feel empowered by “doing something,” without too much interventionism that may not always be welcome by local citizens. One student, Bethany Burke, noted how the trip complemented the material she had gained through preparatory coursework: “I feel as though there was so much that I took away from this trip. Not only was I able to experience different cultures in South Africa, I was able to better connect and understand the material in which I had been studying for some time. The experience was also quite humbling, haunting, and life-changing. Visiting many of the museums really resonated with me, taking me back to a difficult time in recent history.”

Professional Development

Undergraduate students who participate in research-centered study abroad programs gain skills and experiences that are particularly valuable for graduate school and their future careers. Study abroad students are in a unique position to receive intense, focused mentorship from the professors in the program. The faculty to student ratio is much more balanced than for courses offered on campus. As a result, students not only engage with the professors more deeply in class and on field trips, they also receive abundant mentoring while traveling and during leisure time. The heightened student-faculty interaction bolsters academic achievement and educational aspirations among students (Cole, 2007), especially for African American and Hispanic/Latin students (Cole & Espinoza, 2008).

As a result of the study abroad trip, students strengthen their CVs in a number of ways. They gain skills related to collaboration, project design, grant writing, data collection and analysis, and presentation of their work in written and oral formats (Hatcher & Watkins, 2016; Lee & Green, 2016; Solís et al., 2015). They are also able to list international research on their CVs, which is a rare and invaluable accolade. Students' affiliation with the University of Cape Town while abroad is an additional selling point for admission into graduate programs because of its strong, research-based academic standing. Upon returning home, most of our students present their work at professional and student conferences, some of which lead to the awards mentioned earlier, and these presentations and honors similarly serve to enhance their CVs. All of the students in our program are

encouraged to submit their work for publication in student or professional journals and several have done so.

Many students report gaining clarity about their academic and career paths through the program, which is consistent with other authors' findings regarding the benefits of study abroad (e.g., Lee & Green, 2016). The research component allows students to see themselves as researchers and offers effective preparation for graduate school. One student who participated in the program in 2014, Alexis Butts, claimed that the research and program in general, greatly impacted her career path:

“It influenced my decision to join The New School’s International Affairs grad program, which has its own study abroad program in South Africa, which I was also a part of. The program helped influence my graduate thesis, which was on South African housing policy and economic inequality ideas that I was introduced to through the program. I have also recently taken a position at non-profit InterExchange that sponsors J-1 Visas for international college students to come to the U.S. for summer work, essentially a study abroad program. Really the study abroad program has influenced the professional decisions I’ve made over the last five or so years, I owe a ton to the program!”

Another student, Bethany Burke, noted, “The study abroad helped influence my decision to pursue my graduate education in African Studies. I believe that my trip to South Africa gave me an edge on my grad school applications and ultimately aided in my acceptance to UCLA.”

The professional development benefits ascertained through research-intensive study abroad experiences have the potential to be especially impactful for underrepresented students. For African American and Hispanic/Latin students, there appears to be an added benefit of experiencing “an epistemological shift regarding how they [are] socialized to understand education” (Lee & Green, 2016, p. 69). Ethnic minority students who participate in undergraduate research are more likely to be currently enrolled in, have graduated from, or are planning to enroll in a graduate program compared to minority students without undergraduate research experience (Morley, Havick, & May, 1998). One of our students, A’Sharee Brown, described how the trip impacted her graduate school plans: “I can proudly say that studying abroad in South Africa and conducting research affirmed my passion to continue on to graduate school. Also, I strongly believe that my experience abroad contributed to admittance into various graduate programs...My time abroad facilitated the research that I am in the process of conducting [in graduate school] on psychological well-being and helping-seeking that affects various African/African American communities.”

Identity Development

The racial categories used by companies and government agencies in the U.S. differ from classifications used in South Africa. In turn, those who participate in research gain first-hand experience about the social constructions of race. Different terminology about identities not only raises questions about racial classification in the U.S., but also highlights the changing nature of individual concepts of identity. One of the prompts given to students during lecture is to complete the sentence “I am...”. Many students list “American” and discussion often ensues about whether this component of their identity would have been included if the exercise had been done back home. For some ethnic minority students, it may be their first time prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic/racial identity (Landau & Moore, 2001). The discussion about place and the role that the perception of others plays in one’s definition of identity, is a crucial part of one’s development as a global citizen. Our student A’Sharee Brown described this process, “The trip humbled me and exposed my privilege, which was mind-blowing. As an African American female in the United States, I have little to no privilege. However, in South Africa I was privileged in many aspects. Being an

American citizen alone was a privilege, not to mention my access to education, health care, etc. That realization was humbling for me and made appreciate who I am, and where I came from.”

Lee and Green (2016) qualitatively examined the impact of their own South Africa study abroad program on African American undergraduate students. They noted three key findings: 1) students shifted their academic focus as a result of participating in the trip (e.g., all students added an African studies minor to their degree); 2) students developed a more layered, complex ethnic/racial identity; and 3) students greatly strengthened their research skills. The confidence gained through conducting research transferred into other domains such as developing confidence to apply to graduate school. Another important skill gained through research was to become more aware of biases and develop appreciation for multiple ways of knowing. Our students have also developed an awareness of the impact of research beyond their individual projects. Through their assignments and discussions, they have pondered questions such as: How are U.S.-based survey questions interpreted differently outside the U.S.? How does culture influence the ecological validity of research? How might policy makers perceive their findings? If published, could their research findings cause unintentional harm to their participants or the community of people they represent?

The extent to which a South African study abroad program impacts identity development for all students, and particularly African American students, may depend on the extent to which their experiences conform with stereotyped expectations. Some of the African American students on our trips are disheartened to learn that even in Africa, black people have experienced immense oppression, disenfranchisement, and discrimination, much of which continues into the present day. Scholars have noted that identity transformation “require[s] a highly managed visit to Africa, which touch[es] on issues of African-American, rather than contemporary African identities and existence” (Ebron, 1999, p. 920; Mathers, 2004). Neff (2001) pointed out that African-American students often have high expectations to create cultural bonds during study abroad, which are not necessarily met. Students may feel surprised or uncomfortable when they do not fit in with or are not accepted by local residents (Gearhart, 2005).

However, this is not the case for all African American students—whether in our program or other study abroad programs—and several benefits are obtained as well. One of our students Tanisha Flowers, described a positive experience, “The trip impacted and influenced my identity in so many ways. I am proud to be an African American woman, but this trip made me feel more honored of being who I was and where I came from. I was welcomed with love and became overwhelmed when getting off the plane hearing, ‘Welcome home, sister.’ I thought about Black women (and our behavior) in America. Looking at the natural physiques and hairstyles made me think about embracing the real “beauty” of who I am. Coincidentally, learning about the harsh past of Africans made me upset and disgusted, yet to see the strength and resilience of what so many had undergone was inspirational and moving.” Many African American study abroad students develop a stronger sense of self and a better understanding of how historical occurrences connect with the present day (Penn & Tanner, 2009; Tolliver, 2000). They are also able to challenge and dispel the stereotypical information they have learned in the U.S. about Africa and gain clarity about their identity (Lee & Green, 2016).

As students conduct their interviews or archival research, they hear or read personal stories about what life was like under apartheid. These personal narratives help bring the course content to life and complement information gained on the field trips. Research data enhance our class discussions. Students relay quotes from their study participants and ask for clarification. For example, “Why would a person say that they preferred life under apartheid?” or “Why do some South Africans embrace the identity of being colored or black, while others do not?” What is significant, however, is that through these encounters, students of all ethnic groups learn about themselves. As Tolliver

(2000) stated, “The living/learning community that develops during study abroad in Africa can provide a powerful context for helping students deal with the complex relationships that exist in America today and can provide a backdrop for understanding the historical context of Black-White power relations” (p. 115). Talking about racial issues in a context far removed from the U.S., and in an academic and research context offers a unique opportunity to discuss these powerful and personal issues in a safe environment. One of our students, Yvette Castellanos, described this process: “The trip made a big impact and influenced my identity, such that I have a personal reference point to race, racism, and segregation. Before South Africa, I only knew what I knew from the U.S. in regard to racism and segregation, and now through the experience I have another reference point, the hands-on knowledge from what I learned and experienced in South Africa.”

Conclusion

The inclusion of research in our study abroad program provides a means to expand students’ experiences beyond a cultural tourism encounter, allowing them to develop their global, professional, and personal selves. Researching in the field offers students opportunities for a more nuanced examination of a particular topic based on direct exposure and allows them to reflect on their participation in knowledge production. Moreover, it enables students to understand an issue, a challenge, or an event from a unique angle and encourages critical analysis. As evidenced by their comments, the rewards gained through the program and the research component in particular, opened up funding possibilities, led to awards, bolstered their graduate school applications, clarified career goals, and enabled students to reflect on and assess their place in the world. Despite these benefits, there remains room for program improvement, including limitations we have yet to resolve.



“Researching in the field offers students opportunities for a more nuanced examination of a particular topic based on direct exposure and allows them to reflect on their participation in knowledge production.”

As Castiello and Lee (2017) pointed out, there is inequity in the involvement of students in international programs from around the world, with the majority of students travelling from the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and China. Few students from the global south participate in international education. In turn, this can perpetuate economic and social inequality. When developing an effective study abroad program, we are aware of the lack of opportunities available for students from South Africa to reverse the travel. That is, students from the University of Cape Town or other universities are not afforded the opportunity to visit or study at CSUSB. In addition, the research involves participants in South Africa who have yet to see the products or results of these studies and this disconnect perpetuates the very inequality of which students have become aware. Indeed, the ethical considerations of practicing research on South African individuals who gain little from their participation is not unique to this program – it is something with which all academics grapple. This challenge can be overcome in the future with collaborative research involving South African faculty, students, and community members. Certain research orientations, such as Community-Based Participatory Action partnerships (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010), equally value the contributions of scholars and community members and could be employed to balance the power hierarchy and ensure that the benefits resulting from research are shared. This type of design encourages collaboration during all phases of the research process—from project conceptualization to dissemination of the findings—and authorship on presentations and publications is similarly shared. We hope that attention to these issues will yield more fruitful study abroad programs and provide greater opportunities for cross-cultural exchange.

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Appendix South Africa Study Abroad Recruitment Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2PcDSGUVFk>