

# How Study Abroad Shapes Global Careers

## Evidence From the United States

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What is the impact of study abroad on U.S. college students' career paths? What factors of education abroad differentiate alumni who later worked or volunteered for international organizations in the United States and/or in other countries compared with alumni who did not pursue global-career experiences? This article presents findings that address these questions, as indicated by data from a survey the Institute for the International Education of Students conducted of 17,000 participants of its programs between 1950 and 1999. The study illustrates the significant career impact of study abroad on the majority of respondents. The career impact and continued use of foreign language are much greater for alumni who worked internationally than for those who did not. Study abroad for a full year, host university course enrollment, internship participation, and host family living arrangements are all program factors that correlate strongly with future international work.

**Keywords:** *study abroad; education abroad; career impact; career development; international career; global career*

Our post-9/11 world needs culturally sensitive Americans to engage in work and volunteer efforts alongside all people. In spite of the great demand for employees with international experience, a severe shortage exists in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in the United States, according to a recent RAND study (Bikson, Treverton, Moini, & Lindstrom, 2003). The RAND report concluded that major changes are needed to develop international careers of future generations of Americans:

The traditional ways that universities conceived of internationalizing their curricula—by developing academic area studies and language training—may no longer be the best ways of producing broad-gauged professionals. Instead, universities need to devise ways to give students a grounding in thinking and acting across cultures. In particular, they should ask why so many college students arrive saying that they intend to take a year of study abroad but so few actually do so. (pp. 68-69)

Although study abroad was once seen as the domain of language majors, students in most academic backgrounds can find programs that meet their academic and career

goals. The American Council on Education and StudentPOLL commissioned a random survey of 500 American high school seniors planning to attend 4-year colleges in the fall of 2000. More than 60% reported that they were interested in international education to gain career-related experiences (StudentPOLL & the American Council for Education, 2000). According to a University of Texas at Austin survey, nearly 9 out of 10 of their students enrolling in overseas academic programs viewed the experience as something that would help define their career prospects (LaFranchi, 2003).

The American public is also acutely aware of the importance of global mindedness for future generations. In 2002, the American Council on Education polled Americans on their attitudes related to international affairs. Ninety percent of all respondents felt that knowledge of international affairs would be important to the careers of their children or other young people (Siaya, Porcelli, & Green, 2002).

Policy makers, researchers, and practitioners across most fields have called on U.S. higher education to realize its vital role in facilitating the international experience and skill building of more American students. They ask higher education to support and refine existing education abroad programs, as well as design new opportunities that transport participants well beyond the role of a tourist, educational consumer, or isolated and unengaged American abroad. Growing national bipartisan support for international education such as the Lincoln Commission, a congressionally appointed body whose members include leaders in the field, recognizes that education abroad has the unique ability to create global citizens who bring their intercultural knowledge into the work world, their communities, and their families.

Proponents of international education have long known what the RAND analysis recently concluded that studying or working abroad during college is one of the best ways to develop cross-cultural understanding and communication skills, deepen one's perspective on current issues facing the world, strengthen foreign language skills, and cultivate an interest in further contact with other cultures and peoples. Indeed, many Americans who study abroad during college go on to work or volunteer outside the United States or for international organizations in the United States.

This article will first provide an overview of the career impact of education abroad. It will then examine what distinguishes U.S. study abroad participants who developed global careers—including decisions made regarding their program abroad and the long-term impact it had on them—from education abroad students whose careers are not globally oriented. These findings are indicated by data from a retrospective longitudinal study of alumni of study abroad programs offered by the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES).

## Literature Review

The literature on American study abroad has increased dramatically since 1990. Still, the vast majority of current research on the effect of study abroad focuses on language skills gained (e.g., Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Carson & Longhini,

2002; Freed, 1998; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004) or the psychosocial development of participants (e.g., Herman, 1996; Lathrop, 1999; Laubscher, 1994; Wortman, 2002).

Lathrop's (1999) study noted that, "[f]rom a study abroad perspective, not much is known about specific program elements that might influence college students' career decisions and plans" (p. 82). A few studies have focused on how employers view the value of education abroad (Adelman, 1988; Bikson et al., 2003; Thompson, 2004) or how study abroad participants, during or soon after the completion of their experience abroad, feel study abroad has affected or will affect their career goals and paths (Armstrong, 1984; Hannigan, 2001). However, there remains an overall dearth of research on the correlation between education abroad and the career development of U.S. participants once they enter the work world.

A review of the literature yielded only one study that investigated the long-term impact of U.S. study abroad on alumni careers (Wallace, 1999). Wallace (1999) surveyed and interviewed 48 alumni 10 years after their participation during the 1985 to 1986 academic year in Pomona College's Study Abroad Programs. The study abroad programs were located in 10 countries and varied in length from one to two semesters. The results of the two career-related survey questions demonstrated a clear positive impact of studying abroad. Fifty-nine percent of respondents reported that their study abroad experience had a moderate to very significant influence on their career development/advancement. When asked if their careers had been very constructively influenced by studying abroad, 71% of respondents agreed.

One additional study is worth mentioning from a comparative international standpoint. The professional impact of ERASMUS mobility (Bracht et al., 2006) presents data from former ERASMUS students ( $N = 4,589$ ), former ERASMUS teachers ( $N = 755$ ), university leaders ( $N = 626$ ), and employers ( $N = 312$ ) on the career impact that studying or teaching temporarily in another European country. Overall, the wealth of ERASMUS data demonstrates the positive effect of the education abroad experience on participants' future career development. A further discussion of ERASMUS findings that relate to the study presented herein follows the Results section of this article.

## Study Design

IES is a not-for-profit educational institution with a consortium of U.S. universities and colleges that has provided study abroad opportunities through 75 programs in 18 countries during its 58-year history. It currently educates nearly 5,000 students per year.

In 2002, IES conducted a survey of 17,000 alumni who had participated in its programs between 1950 and 1999. The goal of the IES 50-Year Alumni Survey was to explore the long-term impact of studying abroad on participants' academics, career choices, language abilities, and personal development. The survey instrument was developed based on results from a pilot study in 1999, in which 707 alumni (44% of the sample with valid addresses) answered open-ended questions about the effect of study abroad on respondents' lives.

The 2002 retrospective longitudinal survey consisted of 28 questions, many with numerous subquestions, and divided into three categories: (a) basic demographics; (b) impact of key study abroad program elements; (c) and impact of study abroad on select behaviors, attitudes, and specific achievements. The survey measured student outcomes in five general categories: (a) academic choices/attainment, (b) career development, (c) personal and social development, (d) foreign language commitment and use, and (e) intercultural awareness. Each of these five categories contained between four and seven questions asking respondents to rate, on a 5-point Likert scale, the influence of their study abroad experience on a specific developmental measure.

An overall 25% response rate (3,723 of the 14,800 current alumni addresses) and a representative sample were achieved. This level of response was sufficient to estimate statistical confidence at 95%. The study is especially valuable and difficult to replicate, given its large sample size, high response rate, number of years of data, number of U.S. universities where the students were enrolled ( $N =$  more than 500), and the wide range of program models, lengths, and locations.

However, the study design has its limitations, relying on self-reported data and participants' memories that can be selective and decrease over time. There is conflicting research on the reliability and validity of self-reported data. Reports range from those that contend that subjects are inclined to respond according to what they expect researchers want to find (Cook & Campbell, 1979) to those that demonstrate that students are able to self-report accurately depending on factors such as the clarity of the questionnaire and the seriousness with which participants treat their responses (Kuh, Vesper, Connolly, & Pace, 1997).

The IES alumni study also lacks a control group that would be very difficult to achieve given its scope. Without a control group, the results cannot infer causation, only correlation. Furthermore, the nonexperimental design of the study, as is the case with alumni satisfaction surveys, means that the data cannot be used to provide evidence of causation. The correlations can assist professionals advising students about study abroad and career planning. Correlations are also useful in suggesting possible causes that can guide further research. Unless otherwise noted, all of the results reported are statistically significant at the .05 level, which means these results would occur by chance less than 5% of the time.

Prior analyses of the IES 50-year alumni survey results have discussed the effects of program model, study duration, enrollment in foreign university courses, student housing choices, participation in internships/field study, and language study on a variety of outcome measures (see Dwyer, 2004a, 2004b; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Norris & Gillespie, 2005; Ruhter McMillan & Opem, 2004; Steinberg, 2002).

## Results

### Career Impact of Study Abroad

The IES 50-Year alumni survey featured 10 career-related questions. Nine of the questions asked respondents whether studying abroad, or certain aspects of their

**Table 1**  
**Career Impact of Study Abroad**

Survey Question	Total (%)
Participated in an internship or field experience while abroad.	17
a. Of those who participated in an IES internship/field experience, agreed that it assisted or influenced my career.	63
My IES experience ignited interest in a career direction pursued.	62
Enhanced ability to speak foreign language used in the work place.	65
Provided me with an internship experience that shaped my career choices.	49
Acquired skills set that influenced my career path.	77
Established relationships abroad that became professional contacts.	5
Influenced me to get a job overseas.	17
Influenced me to work for a multinational in United States.	14
Influenced me to change career plans.	12

**Table 2**  
**International Work by Sector**

Type of International Work	Total (%)
Paid employee in a private industry	21
Teacher or educator	14
Paid employee for a nongovernmental organization	8
Volunteer for a nonprofit agency	8
In any other way	6
U.S. government employee	5
Consultant	4
Employee for any other government	2

study abroad experience, had influenced their career. Table 1 shows the responses to these questions by all respondents. The study abroad experience enabled the majority of respondents to gain skills that influenced their career path, foreign language ability that they used at work, and interest in a career direction that they pursued. Likewise, of those who participated in an internship or field experience while abroad, the majority reported that the international work-related experience assisted them in their careers.

The remaining career-related question asked if respondents had worked in a globally oriented position, defined as having worked or volunteered in an international capacity, either for an organization located in a foreign country or in a position in the United States that had a specific international component. Of the 3,700 alumni who returned the IES survey, 48% reported working or volunteering in an international capacity at some point since college. Table 2 illustrates that the types of positions held represent a wide range of sectors, with the private and education sectors leading.

**Table 3**  
**Career Impact on Alumni by Decade of Study Abroad Participation**

	1950 to 1969 (%)	1970 to 1979 (%)	1980 to 1989 (%)	1990 to 1999 (%)
Influenced me to get a job overseas.	12	12	16	20
Influenced me to work for a multinational organization in the United States.	5	15	14	15
Engaged in internationally oriented work as a paid employee in private industry.	9	23	25	18
Engaged in internationally oriented work as a paid employee of the U.S. government.	11	6	5	4
Engaged in internationally oriented work as a teacher/educator.	18	9	13	16
Participated in an internship/field placement.	2	14	17	21
The internship experience influenced my career.	100	42	60	69

In Table 3, results by decade from the IES survey show that study abroad alumni are pursuing globally oriented careers in higher numbers than ever before. When compared with respondents who studied abroad in the 1950s and 1960s, alumni of IES programs offered in the 1990s were

1. nearly two times as likely to have been influenced by their IES experience to get a job overseas,
2. three times more likely to have worked for a multinational organization in the United States,
3. twice as likely to have worked in private industry with an international component, and
4. ten times more likely to have participated in internships while studying abroad.

The comparison by decade of alumni with global careers provides a starting point to measure the difference between generations. The alumni of programs from the 1950s reported on the lifespan of their careers, for the most part. However, the respondents who had studied with IES in the 1990s reported on just a fraction of their career path, with decades more of work experience to come. Given the estimates that today’s professionals in the United States will change careers several times during their life and the inevitability that the world will be knit even more tightly in the future, one can hypothesize that many of the alumni of 1990s programs who had not developed global aspects of their careers by the time they were surveyed will do so in time.

## Comparative Results: Correlations With Global Versus Nonglobal Careers

The 48% of IES alumni whose careers have a global dimension indicate a similar pattern in the long-term effect their education abroad experience had on them and in the decisions made regarding their study abroad experiences. These data differ dramatically for outcomes regarding academics and language, career, and interpersonal/intercultural impact when compared with the IES alumni whose careers have remained domestically focused.

Several results stand out as most significant. In the category of academics and language, the results show that the global-work alumni were more than twice as likely to study abroad again after their IES experience. This outcome, along with the higher number of alumni with international careers having studied abroad before their IES program, demonstrates that the more international experiences one has, the more likely one is to develop a globally oriented career. Foreign language is used on a regular basis by more than double the number of international-work alumni.

In the category of career development, alumni who worked in the international arena were nearly 3 times more likely to change career plans following study abroad than the alumni without global work experience. This suggests that global careers are not always planned before study abroad, but that the education abroad experience leads many participants to actively seek an international dimension to their paid and volunteer work. More than double the number of international-work alumni established relationships while studying abroad that became professional contacts.

There were statistically significant differences in the gender profile of the two groups. The global-work respondents were 31% male and 68% female, whereas the nonglobal-work respondents were 26% male and 73% female.

*Academic and language impact of study abroad.* The IES alumni survey included six questions on the influence of education abroad on respondents' academic choices, and an additional two questions regarding further education abroad and continued language usage. Of these questions, five yielded statistically significant results, all with a greater impact on global-career alumni than on their counterparts (see Table 4).

The respondents who worked in an international capacity were 20% more likely to report being influenced by their IES experience to change or expand majors when they returned to their home institution. They also were 20% more likely than their counterparts to credit the influence of education abroad on their decision to attend graduate school. This mirrors the higher percentage of respondents with internationally oriented careers having a graduate degree; 56% of global-career alumni reported having earned a degree beyond the bachelor's level, compared with 49% of nonglobal-career alumni. Even more significant than the difference in educational attainment as measured by

**Table 4**  
**Academic and Language Outcomes**

	Global-Career Alumni (%)	Nonglobal-Career Alumni (%)
Reinforced commitment to foreign language study.	91	80
Influenced my decision to expand/change academic majors.	68	57
Influenced my decision to go to graduate school.	70	57
Studied abroad again after IES program.	22	10
Use a language other than English regularly.	48	23

graduate degrees is that of enrollment in additional study abroad experiences. The international-career alumni were twice as likely to have studied abroad again following their participation in the IES program than the nonglobal-work alumni.

Respondents who developed careers with global aspects were 13% more likely to attribute to study abroad the reinforcement of their commitment to foreign language study. The higher commitment to language study as a result of studying abroad correlates with the higher percentage of alumni with international careers who reported stronger foreign language abilities at the time they were surveyed than the alumni with nonglobal careers. When asked if they currently use a language other than English regularly (defined as more than once a month), 48% of the alumni who worked in an international capacity responded positively; only 23% of the IES alumni whose careers remained domestically focused reported regular use of a foreign language. This difference may be an artifact of the higher numbers of global-career alumni who participated in programs taught in foreign languages than programs taught partially or entirely in English.

*Career influences.* The comparison of career impact by decade yielded statistically significant results for only 40% of the career-related questions—illustrating that there are several ways in which study abroad affects careers universally across generations. In contrast, nearly all of the career-related data were statistically significant when comparing IES alumni who have pursued global careers with those who have not.

The differences in the career impact on the global-career and nonglobal-career alumni are not only statistically significant but also they are dramatic (see Table 5). In addition to the significant difference in influence that study abroad had on changing career plans, it was also the start of relationships that developed into professional contacts for twice as many global-work alumni. This group was 55% more likely to attribute to their education abroad experience an interest in a career direction they pursued. This result suggests that not all participants who go on to develop careers with international aspects are necessarily determined to do so before study abroad. Study abroad may be the key that opens the global career door for up to a third of all participants.



**Table 5**  
**Career Development Outcomes**

	Global-Career Alumni (%)	Nonglobal-Career Alumni (%)
Ignited my interest in a career direction that I pursued.	74	48
Enhanced my ability to speak a language other than English that I have used in a workplace setting.	77	50
Provided an internship experience that shaped my career choices.	57	41
Allowed me to acquire a skill set that influenced my career path.	84	69
Established relationships that became professional contacts.	6	3
Changed my career plans.	18	7

Fifty-five percent more of the international-work alumni reported that studying abroad improved their ability to speak a foreign language that they have used in the workplace. Finally, they were 40% more likely to have taken part in an internship experience that they claimed influenced their career choices. An impressive 84% of alumni who worked internationally attested that their study abroad experience enabled them to acquire a skill set that influenced their career path.

*Cultural and personal development.* In addition to greater career, academic, and language outcomes, the IES global-career alumni experienced a stronger effect of studying abroad on their personal and social development, intercultural competence, and international awareness than the domestic-career alumni. The respondents with international work experience were more likely to maintain contact with host country nationals, as reflected in responses to two related survey questions. They reported higher rates of continued contact with host nationals with whom they lived while studying abroad, including both students and families. This result may be an artifact of the greater number of global-work alumni who lived with host nationals while abroad (see next section). The IES data also show that alumni with international careers were more likely to have maintained contact with host country friends they met while studying abroad (see Table 6).

The alumni with international careers reported being more influenced in their intercultural awareness by study abroad than their IES counterparts. Two thirds of global-work alumni credited education abroad with influencing their life by opening up an interest or passion for another language and/or culture. They were more likely to report that their IES experience influenced them to explore other cultures than the alumni who did not work internationally.

The majority of cultural and personal development factors did not yield statistically significant differences between the global and nonglobal-work alumni. In fact, whether comparing the impact of study abroad by program model, length of

**Table 6**  
**Interpersonal and Intercultural Impact**

	Global-Career Alumni (%)	Nonglobal-Career Alumni (%)
Maintained contact with host country nationals with whom lived.	21	16
Met host country friends with whom have maintained contact.	28	19
Opened up an interest/passion for another language and/or culture.	66	55
Influenced me to explore other cultures.	69	60

program, language of instruction, or decade of participation, the interpersonal and intercultural results provided more similarities than differences, demonstrating the consistent effect of education abroad. For example, 96% of all survey respondents attributed their experience to increasing their self-confidence, a quality that can assist in a multitude of future endeavors. However, personal development and skills gained from the education abroad experience can have a significant ripple effect, as evidenced by Annie Carlin's (London, Spring Semester, 1985) reflections:

Before studying abroad with IES in London, the rest of the world was distant and frightening. . . . I learned to explore countries where the languages and cultures were alien. I have since lived and worked for 9 years in China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United Arab Emirates and traveled to more than 35 countries. I now speak Pashtu, Chinese, and French at varying levels. None of this would have happened without the first step—studying in London.

Carlin's experience illustrates how studying abroad can increase one's self-confidence and ultimately lead to a global career.

*Study abroad program features.* The section above describes the greater impact of study abroad on alumni who developed careers with global aspects compared with the alumni who did not pursue such careers. As researchers, educators, and administrators know, no two study abroad programs are alike. Even within the IES portfolio of programs, a great variety of programs and options within programs exist. However, several factors of the study abroad experience may have contributed to the pursuit of international careers by almost half of its alumni. Possible influences, in order of impact, include language of instruction, length of study abroad, enrollment in host university courses, and internship participation (see Table 7).

Respondents who participated in IES programs conducted solely in a foreign language were 62% more likely to have developed global careers than participants of programs taught exclusively in English. Longer programs also correlated with international careers. The global-work alumni were 40% more likely to have studied abroad for a full academic year than the alumni whose careers remained

**Table 7**  
**Program Features Selected by Alumni With**  
**Global Versus Domestic Careers**

	Global-Career Alumni (%)	Nonglobal-Career Alumni (%)	Total (%)
Participated in a program taught solely in a foreign language.	52	39	45
Participated in a program taught solely in English.	10	18	14
Studied abroad for full year.	38	27	32
Enrolled in foreign university courses.	57	46	51
Participated in an internship/field placement.	19	16	17
Lived with a host family in a homestay.	63	55	59
Lived with American students.	17	27	22
Studied abroad before IES.	23	15	19
Studying abroad influenced choice of undergraduate college.	26	20	23

domestically focused, more of whom participated in summer and semester-long programs.

In addition to choosing the length of study, most IES participants have the option of enrolling in courses offered by the host university while abroad. Alumni with global aspects to their careers were 24% more likely to have taken host university courses than alumni with nonglobal careers. Another choice that most IES students face while abroad is whether to participate in an internship or field placement for academic credit. Most IES programs encourage participants with adequate language skills to participate in such experiential academic opportunities. The global-work alumni were 20% more likely than their counterparts to have participated in an internship or field experience.

A student's housing situation may also influence one's chances of developing an internationally oriented career. Throughout the 50-year period of the IES alumni survey, participants had a range of housing options available to them. These options differed by program because of the variations in availability of housing at the host university and city, host government regulations regarding international student housing, and local customs. The global-career alumni were more likely to have lived with a host family while abroad. Conversely, they were less likely than the nonglobal-work alumni to have lived in apartments with American students. As noted in an earlier section, they have maintained more relationships with host country nationals they met abroad.

This result is not necessarily an artifact of more global-work alumni having lived with local residents while abroad. If it were, then it might follow that the nonglobal-work alumni would have maintained more friendships with American students met abroad. However, the difference between the international-career and

noninternational-career groups was statistically insignificant, with similar percentages of both groups maintaining relationships with U.S. friends met abroad.

All of the correlations with program features are part of a larger picture that depicts the global-career alumni as seeking international experiences at an earlier age than their fellow IES students who did not develop international careers. For example, the international-career group was more likely to study abroad before studying abroad with IES. They were also more likely to have considered study abroad as a criterion when selecting an undergraduate college than the respondents who did not work globally. This may be an artifact of the fact that a higher proportion of students who developed international careers were alumni of IES programs from the 1990s, a decade marked by more sophisticated, intense, and targeted marketing by colleges and universities.

All of these programming data illustrate that students who study abroad longer select programs taught exclusively in a foreign language, enroll in host university courses, participate in internships, and live with host families are more likely to develop international aspects to their careers. This suggests a continuum of decision making that leads many education abroad students to integrate their cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and interests into their professional lives.

## **Discussion of the Career Impact of IES and ERASMUS Study Abroad Programs**

A full discussion analyzing the career results from the IES 50-year alumni survey and the ERASMUS study (Bracht et al., 2006) mentioned in the above literature review is beyond the scope of this article. However, a brief summary of the comparable features and data follows.

The scale of these two surveys differs significantly. Former students are but one of the four groups surveyed in the ERASMUS study. Where the IES survey included alumni from 50 years of programs, the ERASMUS student data only compares the perceived impact on alumni who had participated in the program during the 2000 to 2001 academic year, 5 years following their international education experience, with cohorts from the 1988 to 1989 and 1994 to 1995 academic years, spanning a total of 13 years. Neither survey had a control group. However, the ERASMUS study compares select results with available data from surveys of nonmobile European students, as well as the perceptions of experts on the career characteristics of ERASMUS students compared with nonmobile students, to demonstrate the greater impact that studying abroad has on graduates' career development.

None of the ERASMUS questionnaire items exactly matches those from the IES 50-year alumni study, yet there are key ERASMUS findings that relate to the IES results. For example, 18% to 20% of the three cohorts of ERASMUS students employed 5 years later had been "*regularly employed abroad*—at least for some

time—after graduation” (p. 218). These data are similar to the IES finding that 20% of respondents who had studied abroad during the 1990s reported that their IES experience influenced them to get a job overseas (Dwyer, 2004a). Both studies yielded similar results to questions about the regular use of a foreign language, with affirmative answers from 38%, 40%, and 47% of ERASMUS respondents from the 2000 to 2001, 1994 to 1995, and 1988 to 1989 cohorts and 39% of IES alumni of IES programs from the 1990s.

The majority of former ERASMUS students reported that their study abroad experience was helpful in obtaining their first job. However, this impact has declined from 71% among the 1988 to 1989 cohort to 66% of the 1994 to 1995 students, and only 54% of the 2000 to 2001 participants.

Conversely, an analysis of the statistically significant IES career data by decade shows that, for the most part, the career impact of studying abroad has steadily increased among participants from the 1970s to the 1990s (Dwyer, 2004a). Of those who participated in an IES internship or field experience, a greater proportion of the 1990s participants (69%) agreed that it assisted or influenced their career than the respondents who studied abroad in the 1980s (60%) or 1970s (42%).

## **Conclusion**

Given that study abroad affected the career choices of nearly two thirds of respondents and half of respondents developed careers with global aspects, the longitudinal data from the IES alumni survey clearly indicate the effect of study abroad decisions on future career development. The findings are a useful resource for professionals and faculty advising students on specific program elements to select when shaping their study abroad experience.

In addition, the results of this survey—itsself a significant contribution to the field—suggest the need for further research on the career impact of study abroad. A study could be conducted to compare students’ career aspirations before and immediately following study abroad. It would be interesting to try to ascertain the impact study abroad has on shaping global careers by conducting a study of Americans with a range of global careers, comparing those who had studied abroad with those who had not.

A time-series cohort study of the influence of study abroad, in which the same individuals are studied over time, would be useful in probing questions such as

- How do alumni perceive the effect of study abroad at various intervals following the experience, for example, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years later, and so on?
- How does the impact of study abroad differ by decade of participation in study abroad, as perceived 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years later, and so on?

Such a study would also begin to address issues of recall error posed by the retrospective longitudinal data gathered by the IES alumni survey.

A study comparing the career impact of education abroad on Americans versus ERASMUS students or students from other parts of the world would be revealing. Such a study could more fully contrast existing data, for example, from the IES alumni survey and the professional impact of ERASMUS mobility (Bracht et al., 2006). Given the small number of comparable data between these two surveys, it would be ideal to gather and analyze new data using a single survey instrument.

The IES alumni survey shows that studying abroad truly does change one's life. Living and studying in another country engage and affect participants' personal development, worldview, and intellectual and cultural interests, influencing their future decisions. The data demonstrate a sequence of decisions that students make, beginning with the resolution to study abroad that correlates with the lasting effect of developing a career with a global focus. The sequence includes choices regarding programmatic and curricular aspects of the education abroad program, major changes and further language study following study abroad, the commitment to pursue graduate work and additional experiences abroad, and changes in career plans and the pursuit of international paid or volunteer work. Gary Abramson's (IES Madrid, 1978) recollection illustrates the domino effect a single course abroad can have

My semester [abroad] launched me into a personal and professional involvement with Spain that has already lasted 25 years. A political science lecture in Madrid about U.S. and Spanish involvement in an obscure war in Sahara . . . led to a graduate fellowship to Spain and North Africa, which led to work as a foreign correspondent based in Spain.

Students who visit the study abroad office on campus are already considering the first decision, whether or not to study abroad. The correlations between other decisions suggest that the study abroad and faculty advisors serve an important function in helping students investigate program options. Advisors and students need to understand not only the student's priorities for studying away from the home institution but also the student's ideas about graduate school and career. Students with international or intercultural career aspirations should be advised to consider programs that are conducted in a language other than English, run for a full academic year, include an internship component, house students with host country nationals, and/or feature courses offered by the host university.

Mimi Geffel Kimbrough's (IES Nantes, France, 1966 to 1967) comments demonstrate the lasting influence of study abroad on all aspects of participants' lives:

I can honestly say that my life has been shaped and reshaped by my year with IES. Without the experience and friends I made in Nantes, I would never have taken the roads and detours that have led to such a fascinating life and career.

If every college student today was encouraged to study abroad to explore the possibility of or prepare for globally oriented work, tomorrow's world would be shaped and reshaped by minds and hearts influenced by the unique experience of education abroad.

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