

## CHAPTER 1

# A New Look at Study Abroad

(T)he personality does not just unfold automatically according to a plan of nature. Whatever the stage of readiness in the personality, further development will not occur until stimuli arrive to upset the existing equilibrium and require fresh adaptation.

—Nevitt Sanford, “Where Colleges Fail”

One of the central tenets of college student development literature is that students change during their college years (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chickering, 1969; Kohlberg, 1971; Perry, 1968). While students are at different developmental levels and at different times while in college, the challenge and support concept of college student development put forth by Sanford (1962) applies throughout the college years. The “challenge and support” concept refers to the optimal conditions under which college students grow and develop. The appropriate amount of challenge can provide potentially growth-producing conditions as the student encounters complexity, ambiguity, diversity, and other stressful experiences that require new ways of coping. Too little challenge may not provide conditions conducive to growth and development. The appropriate amount of support can provide a degree of familiarity for the student, as well as the attention, caring, and empathy necessary for tackling other challenges in life. Too little support can produce unhealthy feelings of being overwhelmed, overstressed, and dissatisfied, and even illness and exit from the environment (Huebner & Lawson, 1990; Tinto, 1993).

Studying abroad is an academic experience, whether short term (as short as 1 week) or longer (up to a full academic year), during which students physically leave the United States to engage in college study, cultural interaction, and more in the host country. It may include foreign language study, residing with a foreign host

family, internships, and service. Studying abroad, and its impact on student development, is a subject with a worthwhile, but limited, body of research.

My study investigated the impact of studying abroad on one measure of college student development (intellectual development) on undergraduate students during one study abroad semester. This research aimed to measure college students' intellectual reasoning ability prior to and at the end of their study abroad semester using the MID (Moore, 1990), an existing instrument done in essay format. The information gathered from students taking this instrument was combined with demographic data, data defining the type of study abroad program experienced, and data provided by students describing their activities during their study abroad semesters.

Measuring the impact of studying abroad is difficult, because the experience itself is complicated, and many factors can shape a study abroad experience for the student involved. As one student participant in this study reported at the end of her semester in Ireland:

This study abroad experience has taught me a great deal about myself as a learner and as a person. I have had the opportunity to work with other people from the United States but also with many other Europeans as well. I have learned a great deal about how the world views the United States, and the everyday decisions it makes as a world leader. I have been forced to become a more open and accepting individual (a characteristic I value greatly) and am pleased to say that I know more about the world, but also found out how little I did know before this experience.

I worked in a group atmosphere with three Irish students, one Canadian student, and one Swedish student. We all had to overcome stereotypes about cultures to work together. I am pleased to say that I value the relationships I have made with students from other cultures and learned a great deal about everyday life and learning from these students.

This student describes her own growth and learning while abroad in a varied and rich way. It was part location, part cohort, part distance from home, part self-awareness, part cultural, part per-

sonal, and much more. Any one of these aspects of the study abroad experience would be complex to study, making the whole endeavor a tough nut to crack.

One reason for this complexity of analysis is the various program options available, reflecting the uniqueness and diversity of American colleges and universities themselves. Higher education researchers and leaders consistently cite the importance of undertaking initiatives within the cultural context of a particular campus as a key ingredient of its potential for success. Birnbaum (1988), for example, believed that approaches or policies fruitful for one institution may in fact be harmful for another; Shaw (1999) stated that frustration and failure can result if the values, vision, and people of the institution are ignored. What these observations share is the suggestion that any attempt at serious study abroad assessment, like the organization of study abroad programs themselves, must be grounded in campus culture without a one-size-fits-all approach (McKeown & Nekritz, 2006).

Students study abroad in study centers mostly with other U.S. college students, and they study directly in foreign university settings, as well as in programs that combine the two. Students live in culturally rich environments, such as host families and international living centers, and live with other U.S. students in program-arranged apartments or residence halls. They study and live abroad in foreign language countries as well as English language countries, and some seek out and take part in activities and experiences that immerse them into the local cultural milieu, while others spend most of their time socializing with U.S. friends, traveling, and taking part in touristic activities. These variables in the study abroad experience can make any outcome of studying abroad difficult to measure.

Similarly, intellectual development is a complicated process influenced by many factors. It is possible that something this complicated may not be possible to measure over one semester's duration, even if the activities and program experienced may have a direct or delayed impact. However, a well-run semester study abroad program has many intentionally designed components that provide a suitable venue in which to study intellectual development in college students.

My study was built upon previous ones that demonstrated that studying abroad can have some positive impact on college student learning and personal growth. In particular, the work of Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990) and Citron (1996) will be discussed. These researchers found that study abroad students show an enhanced ability to understand complexity, one aspect of intellectual development, and that the differences in study abroad program structure and experience can impact the outcomes of study abroad for the students involved. Program structure and experience are dimensions explored in this research study. This study also is based on the premise that as study abroad participation rates and the diversity of program offerings are rising nationally (Institute of International Education, 2004), more research is needed on the impact of studying abroad on college students generally, and specifically research examining particular variables in program type important to studying abroad (Engle & Engle, 2003). The need for more analytical study abroad research, in particular research that is less anecdotal and descriptive, also has been cited (De Wit, 1997; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005).

### **Problem**

As colleges and universities seek to increase the number of students studying abroad and expand the number and type of study abroad programs offered, there should be a concurrent investigation into the effect that these programs are having on participating students. Institutions of higher education, among other objectives, seek to enhance students' global awareness and competence, an area where studying abroad has been shown to be effective (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001; Drews, Meyer, & Peregrine, 1996; Sharma & Mulka, 1993; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). But colleges and universities also have an interest in enhancing students' understanding of diversity, critical thinking ability, and ethical conduct. Enhancing a student's intellectual reasoning ability can contribute to these important competencies (Kohlberg, 1971; Mines, King, Hood, & Wood, 1990; Perry, 1968). Understanding how studying abroad impacts intellectual development can help colleges and universities justify

the increased focus on studying abroad in new ways, as well as demonstrate the ways in which studying abroad contributes to student success.

### **Background**

Students in the United States are studying abroad in increasing numbers. A record number of over 200,000 U.S. college students chose to study abroad in 2004–2005, a figure that has quadrupled over the past 20 years, according to the Institute of International Education, or IIE (IIE, 2006). Calls to increase study abroad participation and greater global competence come from many sources, both inside and outside the academy (Marcum, 2001; NAFSA, 2003; Syracuse University, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Colleges recognize the responsibility of preparing students for the realities of the world, to learn about other peoples and cultures, and to do so in an appropriate, respectful manner. The student affairs profession also has been encouraged to globalize, both to prepare students for the complex, global economy and the society they are about to enter and to reinforce tolerance, respect for diversity, and understanding of complex global social, economic, political, and environmental challenges for the benefit of the rest of campus (Christie & Ragans, 1999). Studying abroad is positively associated with these desired outcomes.

Still, studying abroad is not for everyone. It is only one of many activities in which college students can participate, and it is sometimes difficult to include during a demanding, multifaceted undergraduate education. It can be expensive and frightening, and not every professional career can benefit directly from the language and cultural skills typically learned through studying abroad. There are at least two major reasons to study this type of student experience. The first has to do with the arrival of the so-called global village. As the late Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California system, stated:

Since the late 1970s, the theme of a “global perspective” has emerged. . . . (T)he notion of a “global village” has replaced the older international dream of a “world order,” and emphasizes the interdependence of all the peoples of the world. (1985, p. xiv)

The cultural and linguistic challenges of international business, the competitive pressures caused by globalization of the economy (Koveos & Tang, 2004), the ongoing impact of 9/11, and the role played by the United States in the larger world (Ferguson, 2001), the ecological impact of global warming and other international environmental challenges, and technologically facilitated Internet and telephonic communications are all evidence of global interdependence that today's U.S. college students cannot avoid.

Today we know that, at the beginning of the 21st century, activities and interactions that once were assumed to occur within the borders of one state are increasingly occurring across national boundaries. Employment, business relationships, professional associations, and social and family connections are some examples (Opello & Rosow, 2004). This ongoing process of globalization, which has been defined as "the complex of economic, technological, ecological, and cultural structures that are emerging on a global scale which ignore or deny the relevance of any state's territory" (Poggi, 1990, p. 117), has led to new challenges to the notion of a national identity and new pressures on the individual to engage competently in the free flow of ideas, commerce, and communications across national boundaries (Opello & Rosow, 2004). To the extent that studying abroad is viewed as a way to prepare U.S. students to engage in this more global society, it warrants further examination.

The second major reason to examine studying abroad, and the direction this book is taking, is its effect on college student development. As Sanford stated:

. . . the personality does not just unfold automatically according to a plan of nature. Whatever the stage of readiness in the personality, further development will not occur until stimuli arrive to upset the existing equilibrium and require fresh adaptation. (1967, p. 54)

For the student engaged in a study abroad experience, almost everything is new and presents a challenging opportunity to learn. Regardless of the structure of the study abroad experience, its duration, or its quality, an American student placed in a foreign environment must navigate through new customs and practices to accomplish everyday tasks, both basic and complex. Ordering breakfast,

catching the bus, paying for goods and services, and, of course, communicating with and understanding people all fall under the category “stimuli requiring fresh adaptation.” As one student participant in this study stated about his semester in Madrid, Spain:

From the moment that I arrived in Madrid for the orientation, I knew that this experience was going to change my views on the world. Even in a big city like Madrid it was evident that the country of Spain was extremely different than New York. This experience has helped me to realize what is inherently different is not always bad. . . . Additionally, I do think that most of my learning was done outside the classroom and was influenced by outside events. Although I took a class in Spanish language I feel as though most of my learning of the language was done by simply talking to native Spaniards.

This student, in retrospect, knew that some of his biggest learning opportunities occurred in the daily charms and challenges of life in Madrid, and from his actual conversations with the Spanish people. Writing shortly after his spring 2004 semester abroad, he specifically cited how experiencing the Madrid terrorist bombings in the Atocha train station on March 11, 2004, along with his fellow Madrileños, was important to him:

My learning from these events was centered around the reaction to the attacks. During the day after the attacks the Spanish people took to the street to protest and express sympathy for those murdered. This did not happen in the United States after September 11. Neither did the new government react by taking away the civil liberties of the citizens. Furthermore, the Spaniards themselves did not seem to be living in fear of another attack; they simply went on with their lives, which did not happen here in America after September 11, and which is still not happening today.

While reacting to a terrorist attack is, thankfully, still not a common experience either in the United States or abroad, this student’s experience exemplifies vividly how important those actual

moments of cultural interaction are in providing a catalyst for learning and growth on the part of study abroad students.

As mentioned earlier, studying abroad is growing in popularity (IIE, 2005). While it has grown in enrollment numbers, it also has been changing, as can be seen in several recent findings. First, studying abroad has become increasingly appealing to students with different majors. For example, in 1986, social science, humanities, and foreign language majors accounted for 56% of study abroad participants. By 2002, those majors accounted for less than 45% of study abroad participants. During the same time, business, physical science, health science, math, engineering, and computer science majors increased from 19% of study abroad participants to 33% (IIE, 2003). Second, the destination of study abroad programs is becoming more diverse. In 1986, Europe accounted for nearly 80% of study abroad participation but in 2002, only 63%. Latin America, Asia, Oceania, and multiple destination study abroad programs increased from 14% to 33% of all study abroad participation during that same time (IIE, 2003). While we know something about what motivates students to study abroad, and what concerns they may have (Martin & Rohrich, 1991; McKeown, 2003; Schroth & McCormack, 2000), a deeper understanding of the benefits to students studying abroad is needed.

These changes in participation patterns suggest that new methods of measuring what is happening to students who study abroad should be considered. Research on studying abroad as a vehicle to enhance language acquisition (Citron, 1995; Rivers, 1998; Thot, 1998) and international understanding (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Drews, Meyer, & Peregrine, 1996; Sharma & Mulka, 1993; Sutton & Rubin, 2004) is available. However, as study abroad programs attract a lower proportion of foreign language majors, measuring gains in language acquisition is becoming less applicable to study abroad students overall. Likewise, as short-term programs, sometimes as short as several weeks or less, now account for the majority share of study abroad participation (IIE, 2006), measuring demonstrable gains in country-specific knowledge, cultural understanding, and international awareness could be considered less relevant.

The need for additional research on the impact of studying abroad has been identified within the study abroad profession



(NAFSA, 2003; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2003) and by international education researchers (De Wit, 1997; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005), and the benefits of studying abroad have been questioned from outside the study abroad profession (Feinberg, 2002; Roochnik, 2001). The common question in these calls for greater understanding about study abroad is: Are students benefiting from study abroad programs in ways that are measurable and useful? A broader understanding of what is happening to students developmentally while abroad will contribute both to study abroad practitioners and to the field of higher education research.

### **Student Development during Study Abroad**

As both a researcher and a professional coordinating study abroad programs, I am concerned about the general topic of growth and development that occurs during the study abroad experience. Intellectual development is one facet of college student development; it is an evolving process and occurs in interaction with the environment (King, 1990). Intellectual development (or cognitive development) is typically defined as the process during which the individual actively attempts to make sense out of her or his experience. This attempt at making meaning out of experience often requires that the individual construct new ways of understanding life, an internal logic that allows her or him to interpret events in a manner that is explainable and understandable (King, 1978).

Intellectual development is one facet of college student development and is important to the field of higher education because studying changes in students' intellectual development allows educators to determine whether a college education, as well as its separate components and programs, is providing good opportunities for appropriate challenge and growth. Studying abroad involves international travel, cultural unfamiliarity, and often foreign languages; it is the type of experience that is challenging and sometimes uncomfortable, what Kim (1988) calls the "adversarial nature of the cross-cultural adaptation process" (p. 144). Consequently, studying abroad could provide a meaningful venue in which to examine the impact of these experiences on students' meaning-making structures. The

challenges that are typically a part of studying abroad could provide stress, diversity, ambiguity, and unfamiliarity—what Huebner and Lawson (1990) refer to as the mismatch between the environment and the student's current coping skills that often facilitates intellectual developmental growth.

*Optimal Conditions for Student Development to Occur*

Baxter Magolda (1992) argued that intellectual development can be facilitated by well-structured, intentionally implemented academic and co-curricular activities. Broader student development research shows that experiences outside the classroom can be associated with student learning and personal development (Kuh, 1995); that moral development can be facilitated by deliberate activities such as the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1980) and morally focused, teacher-led discussions (Kohlberg, 1980); that on-campus leadership education and involvement in leadership programs can facilitate in students an appreciation of desired attitudes, such as civic responsibility and multicultural awareness (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001); that psychosocial outcomes can be influenced by students' choices of activities and effort during college (Martin, 2000); and that factors such as exposure to cultural, religious, racial, and social diversity during college (Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001) and the characteristics of the college attended (Flowers & Pascarella, 1999) can influence outcomes such as critical thinking.

In the field of study abroad research, Citron (1996) found that program structure, particularly the lack of a program director, organized orientation, and guided learning activities, negatively affected cultural integration in the host country. Rivers (1998) discovered that gains in foreign language ability do not always improve when a student participates in a family home stay when studying abroad. And Marion (1980) found that certain political attitudes in students can be influenced by the study abroad program country and program structure. These findings illustrate the complexity of studying abroad, that its outcomes go beyond language and culture skills, that we should be careful in making assumptions about its benefits, and that more than a cursory review of it as a subject matter is overdue.

The research cited earlier shows that certain types of experiences can have an impact on student development and other outcomes in on-campus settings. Further, it shows that deliberately organized and implemented experiences are preferable to more passive ones for fostering student development in on-campus settings and for program outcomes in studying abroad. Together this research suggests that study abroad programs would benefit from research designed to measure student developmental outcomes in similar ways.

Student development differs from maturation in that research on student maturation, such as Heath's model of maturing, holds that students will adapt to new circumstances and will over time become stable, autonomous beings able to resist bias and disruptive influences (Widick, Parker, & Knefelkamp, 1978). This philosophical approach suggests passivity: things simply happen, and students adjust to what is happening in order to survive. Similarly, research on international experiences often has focused on certain adjustment behaviors, such as skills acquisition and the adoption of social roles (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), and the largely uniform development of second culture coping skills (Adler, 1975) instead of intellectual development. A student who is developing intellectually is undergoing a process of upward developmental movement that allows for a greater capacity to understand and make meaning out of both the experience at hand and future ones. This process is not assured and occurs best when done actively in a supportive environment with appropriately challenging activities and programs (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978).

As stated previously, there is reason to believe that students develop during the college years, and that certain activities facilitate this development. This study seeks to understand whether studying abroad is one of the types of experiences that facilitate student intellectual development. The impact of studying abroad on student development is an area where some interesting, but limited, literature exists (Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver, & Weaver, 1992). Using Perry's (1968) scheme for describing intellectual development during college, a scheme that has not been applied to study abroad students in this way, I set out to learn more about whether study abroad students are developing intellectually,

and if any particular aspects of study abroad programs are associated with this development.

Research on the psychological impact of international experiences has led some researchers to conclude that “meaning disruptions” (McNamee & Faulkner, 2001, p. 73) and restorations are a part of the international exchange experience (McNamee & Faulkner, 2001), and that culture shock (Oberg, 1960), a reaction often associated with negative stress, strain, unfamiliarity, and trauma, can be positive if it leads to personal growth (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

For study abroad professionals, who commonly refer to the “eye-opening” changes that we see in our returning students, including students having a “different perspective” or perhaps being “more mature,” having greater insight into how the experience affects our students in ways that we can measure and document would benefit our practice. As one veteran study abroad administrator commented for this book about his 27 years of experience working with study abroad students:

They acquire a new sense of themselves and bring that sense home with them. In the midst of so many people back home who do not care or understand, students find a few who do—including us, of course, and some faculty, and increasingly, one or more gatekeepers to career opportunities. Like the Road Less Traveled, the study abroad experience makes all the difference as it continues to affect students’ lives far into their adulthood.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study focused on one semester’s study abroad student populations at eight U.S. colleges and universities. These students all studied abroad during the spring 2004 semester through the programs administered by these colleges and universities. Survey data and essays were used to assess student participation and gains in intellectual development. The purposes of this study were to determine whether gains in intellectual development occurred in students during one semester of study abroad participation, and to identify

which variables (demographic variables and/or survey items) were associated with any gains in intellectual development seen in the students.

### **Study Variables**

I chose the following study variables because of their importance in study abroad research (Engle & Engle, 2003) and higher education research, as explained later. Survey questions designed to obtain information from students on these questions will be covered in chapter 3.

#### *Gender*

The question of gender is important, for several reasons. First, study abroad participation is not proportionally even between genders. Study abroad students are and have been mostly women, consistently comprising over 60% of annual study abroad participation (IIE, 2003), what Hoffa calls the historical “gender demarcation” (Hoffa, 2007, p. 83) of studying abroad. Women comprise 56% of undergraduate students overall in the United States (Horn, Peter, & Rooney, 2000). Second, and more important, the leading researchers in this field have shown that patterns in intellectual development can be gender related. For example, intellectual developmental patterns used more often by women students tend to value their own, and others’, personal experiences during the learning process (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Whereas patterns used more often by male students are typically associated with students’ own learning and forming their own opinions, those more often used by women incorporate the opinions of classmates and others in their lives. Intellectual developmental patterns more often used by men also are more typically associated with reluctance to let go of certainty, and with being more threatened by the inclusion of others’ ideas into their own (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Further, women tend to value educational lessons that grow out of personal relationships, such as with peers, friends, and teachers, as well as life crises and interactions with their community over traditional

academic work and pedagogical techniques (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

The research of Baxter Magolda and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule suggests that the intense and often unfamiliar cultural interactions that characterize studying abroad, as well as the personal relationships formed with peers and teachers from other schools and possibly the host country, could be an integral part of the intellectual developmental process for some study abroad students. The “rebuilding and self-examination” (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 330) that can occur when studying abroad seem especially important for women’s more personalized and contextualized ways of knowing. Also, what limited research there is on this subject has shown that female and male students experience studying abroad differently, particularly that women express more predeparture concerns about housing, meeting people, and dealing with unfamiliar situations (Martin & Rohrllich, 1991), and women study abroad students sometimes find the host country not as welcoming (Anderson, 2003). These concerns do not reduce their numbers since, as stated earlier, women far outnumber men in study abroad programs. However, this research suggests that women may be more aware of the challenges they are going to face when studying abroad, and possibly that many men would rather not experience that challenge, or perhaps do not initially consider studying abroad as challenging as women do. Since making meaning out of complex and challenging experiences is associated with intellectual development, the impact of gender on intellectual development when studying abroad was investigated.

#### *Language of the Study Abroad Country*

The language of the study abroad country is important because, from the standpoint of challenge and support, it is very challenging to study and live in a country whose dominant language is not one’s own (Citron, 1996; Rivers, 1998; Thot, 1998). Also, the language of the study abroad country is considered an important distinguishing characteristic of study abroad program types (Engle & Engle, 2003). If supported properly, this could be the type of challenging and diverse experience that has been shown to be associated with student

development in general (Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001). The two dominant English-speaking study abroad destinations (the United Kingdom and Australia) alone account for approximately 25% of all study abroad participation annually. The other top destinations for U.S. study abroad students (Spain, France, Italy, and Mexico) are all foreign language environments. No other country besides the six mentioned receives more than 3% of the total annual study abroad student population (IIE, 2003). Since U.S. students are a reflection of their own generally monolingual society (NAFSA, 2003; Thot, 1998), the degree of challenge for students traveling to foreign language destinations could be higher than for those traveling to English language destinations, resulting in the potential for greater intellectual developmental gain. Through this study I sought to learn whether there was any evidence that this was so.

#### *Amount of Cultural Immersion*

The amount of cultural immersion built into the program is important, because it is considered by study abroad professionals an important distinguishing characteristic of study abroad program types (Engle & Engle, 2003), and because study abroad program structures historically have had different amounts of emphasis on host culture immersion experiences for students (Walker, 1999). By cultural immersion in studying abroad I mean that there are distinctions in program design and structure that directly impact the amount of time and involvement that students have with the host country culture. Two important aspects of study abroad program structure, among others, can be used to demonstrate these distinctions: (1) Where, and with whom, do U.S. students study while abroad? (2) Where, and with whom, do U.S. students live while abroad? Study abroad professionals consider both of these characteristics important ways to characterize the nature and quality of study abroad program types (Engle & Engle, 2003). In addition, examining which activities students choose to engage in while abroad also may help answer the question of whether or not cultural immersion impacts student development. These three possible factors contributing to cultural immersion while abroad are discussed next.

*Where, and with Whom, Do U.S. Students Study While Abroad?*

First, regarding where, and with whom, U.S. students study while abroad, the two most common program models in study abroad programs today are the direct placement experience (in which a student is placed into a host university, usually taking the same curriculum as host country students alongside host country students) and the study center (or island program) model (in which U.S. students study alongside mostly, or only, other American students, often taking courses specially designed for U.S. study abroad students) (Monalco, 2002). The direct placement experience is typically associated with greater challenge and involvement (Citron, 1996; Thot, 1998). Previous higher education research (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 1995) has shown that student involvement, particularly the amount of effort the student puts forth in the learning process, is important to student development. In this study I sought to learn whether there was any evidence that intellectual developmental gains for study abroad students in direct placement programs at foreign universities differed from those attending U.S.-dominated study centers.

*Where, and with Whom, Do U.S. Students Live While Abroad?*

Second, regarding where, and with whom, U.S. students live while abroad, previous research (Monalco, 2002) has distinguished study abroad student accommodation options into categories that reflect greater amounts of cultural immersion. Namely, living with a foreign host family, as opposed to living only with other U.S. students, has been positively associated with cultural immersion. Further, having host country roommates in a residence hall or an apartment could contribute to greater cultural immersion. In this study I sought to learn whether there was any evidence that intellectual developmental gains for study abroad students experiencing greater cultural immersion in their living arrangements could be found.

*Students' Activities When Studying Abroad*

Lastly, study abroad students can engage in activities while abroad that expose them to greater cultural immersion. As with on-campus



students, the amount of effort and time put forth in these endeavors could positively affect their development. Examples of these activities include internships, student teaching, community service and volunteer work, residence life, class projects focused on the host country, quality interactions with host country faculty, clubs and activities, and serious discussions with students or others from the host country. Higher education researchers and policy makers have identified these kinds of activities as being valuable, providing opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply knowledge, resulting in deeper, more meaningful learning (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2000). In this study I sought to learn whether participating in activities such as those just mentioned positively contributed to gains in intellectual development.

#### *Previous International Travel Experience*

Previous international travel experience is an important variable, because research has shown that international influences on students, such as travel and having parents who are internationally mobile, can lead to greater acceptance of other cultures, greater independence, and greater international awareness compared to students who do not have such an internationally oriented upbringing (Gerner, Perry, Moselle, & Archbold, 1992). Also, college students' perceived intercultural competence is higher for those who previously had been abroad than for those who had either never been abroad or who had been abroad for a relatively short time (Martin, 1987). This study sought to examine whether there was any evidence that gains in intellectual development that may occur when studying abroad differ for those who had had a meaningful international experience prior to studying abroad and for those who had not.

#### **My Role as Researcher**

I approached this research study mainly from the role of a study abroad practitioner. Practitioners have long believed in the benefits of studying abroad, and this study was an attempt to contribute to our understanding of the topic. I approached the subject less as a

theorist or methodologist and more as a curious practitioner seeking to answer some questions that may help us do our work in a better, more informed way.

I approached the subject of intellectual development on studying abroad as both a former study abroad participant and now as a study abroad professional. I studied in Madrid, Spain, in 1990–1991. My study abroad program was for two semesters, during which I was enrolled in a study center for U.S. students, worked as an English teacher, lived with a host family, and studied in a foreign language country. Prior to studying abroad, I had never been abroad (other than very short trips to Canada).

My current professional work is in study abroad administration at the State University of New York at Oswego, where I am employed as the director of International Education and Programs. I work in the daily management of study abroad programs, from recruiting and advising to program management overseas. Our college's portfolio of programs includes study centers and direct immersion programs and short-term and semester programs, with a range of housing arrangements, in both English and non-English-speaking countries.

My background in study abroad programs as both a student and a practitioner has led me to reflect on my own life experiences and how I changed as a result of studying abroad. It also has led me to ask questions about my work, in particular, the effect that studying abroad, in its variations and diversity, is having on my students currently. I sought to answer some of these questions with this research study.