

Spring 2009 Study Abroad

Overview

During the Spring 2009, the Study Abroad Impact Survey (SAIS) was repeated for current Study Abroad (SA) students and the same three open-ended questions were asked to students. The questions were:

- Indicate how a particular experience while in this study abroad program has changed your attitudes, values or behaviors.
- Why did you decide to participate in a study abroad program?
- Upon reflection, what would you tell another student at USF who is considering participating in a study abroad experience as to what they can expect from such an experience?

Similar to Fall 2008, each question was analyzed for common language text, and categories were created to quantify the students' perceptions. Categories described herein are similar to our Fall 2008 analysis. Each category is represented by a corresponding graph that shows the number of responses (circle) in a particular category and its relationship with the other categories. Additionally, actual student responses were added to emphasize the categories interpretation.

The analysis contained herein is a result of 136 students surveyed and 42 written responses, a 31% return rate. Of these 42 responses, 29 responded to our above first question (21%); 33 responded to our second question (24%); and 34 responded to our third question (25%).

Overall, students indicated similar perceptions as found in our Fall 2008 analysis. They enjoyed their experience abroad and would recommend other students to participate in a study abroad program. Students also maintained that even though the experience was challenging, the personal growth achieved made the experience worthwhile.

Question No. 1:

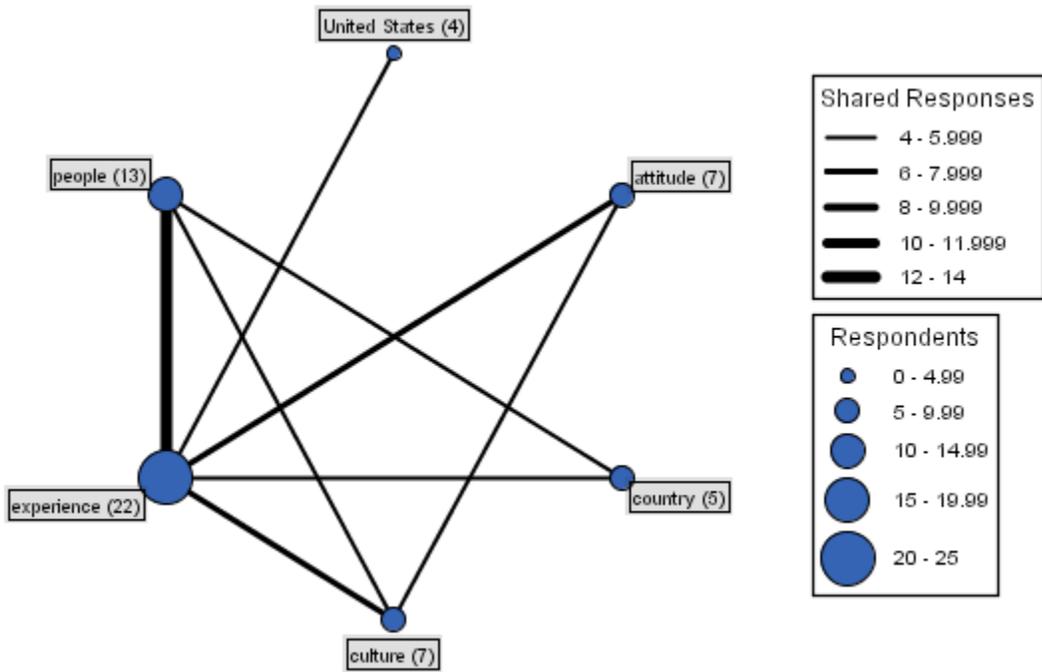
Indicate how a particular experience while on study abroad program has changed your attitudes, values or behaviors

For this question, students talked about their study abroad experience and different aspects that affected their attitudes, values and behaviors. Students replied that participating in a study abroad program was a life changing experience and responded in similar patterns that can be categorized as follows:

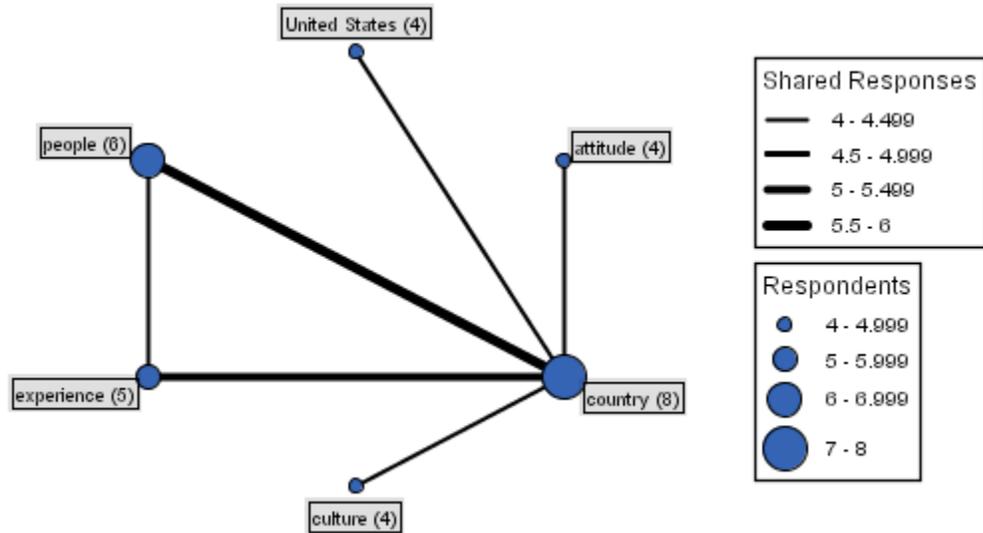
1. *Experience*: captures all responses where students maintained that the whole experience of participating in the study abroad program changed their attitudes, values or behaviors.
2. *People*: this category includes all responses where students talked about how the people they met abroad had an impact on their personal beliefs.
3. *Culture*: has all responses where students talked about how involvement in a different culture changed their attitudes, values and/or beliefs.
4. *Country*: captures all responses where students reported how the characteristics about a specific country changed or had some affect in their beliefs.
5. *Attitudes*: includes all responses where personal experiences caused a student to think about and/or reconsider the values and beliefs they previously held.
6. *United States*: in this category students' responses referred to differences in values and beliefs between the United States and their study abroad country.

The relationship among these six categories was analyzed as follows:

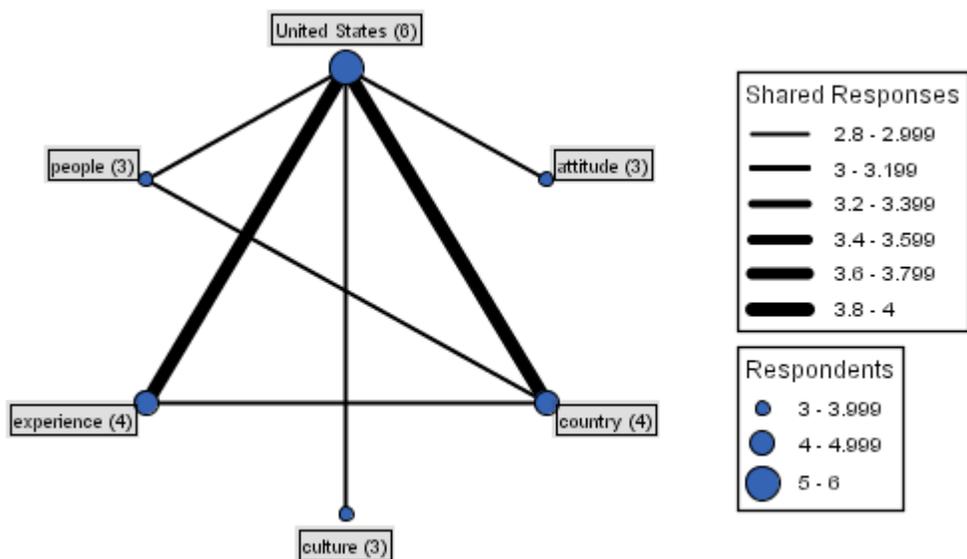
Study Abroad *experience* was the single largest reason mentioned by students for changes in attitude, values or behaviors with 76% of the question respondents indicating that the whole experience changed their attitudes, values, and/or behaviors. *Experience* also has a large relationship with country *culture* where 32% of the responses mentioning their study abroad experience also mentioned that the country's culture gave them the opportunity to evaluate their own attitudes. Additionally, the experience that students had interacting with *people* (59%) in their respective study abroad country was a significant contributor to reevaluating their attitudes and values. The graph below shows these relationships:



Some *countries* affected the attitudes of students more than others, 28% of students that answer this question took the time to talk specifically about their study abroad country. They mentioned that the *culture* and *people* of these countries caused students to reconsider their attitudes, values, and/or behaviors. Argentina, Croatia, Ecuador, Hungary, Italy, Morocco, and Poland were countries specifically highlighted in this question where 75% of the responses maintained the people with whom they interacted as the most significant contributor. Likewise, 63% stated that country culture made students' study abroad experience more valuable and interesting.



Many study abroad countries had a strong impact on students where 21% of the students reassessed values and attitudes held in the *United States* in comparison to their study abroad country. From all the responses that mentioned the US, 67% of these responses maintained that students achieved a new vision of everything they knew, or thought they knew, by comparing the living standards between the study abroad *country* and the *United States*.



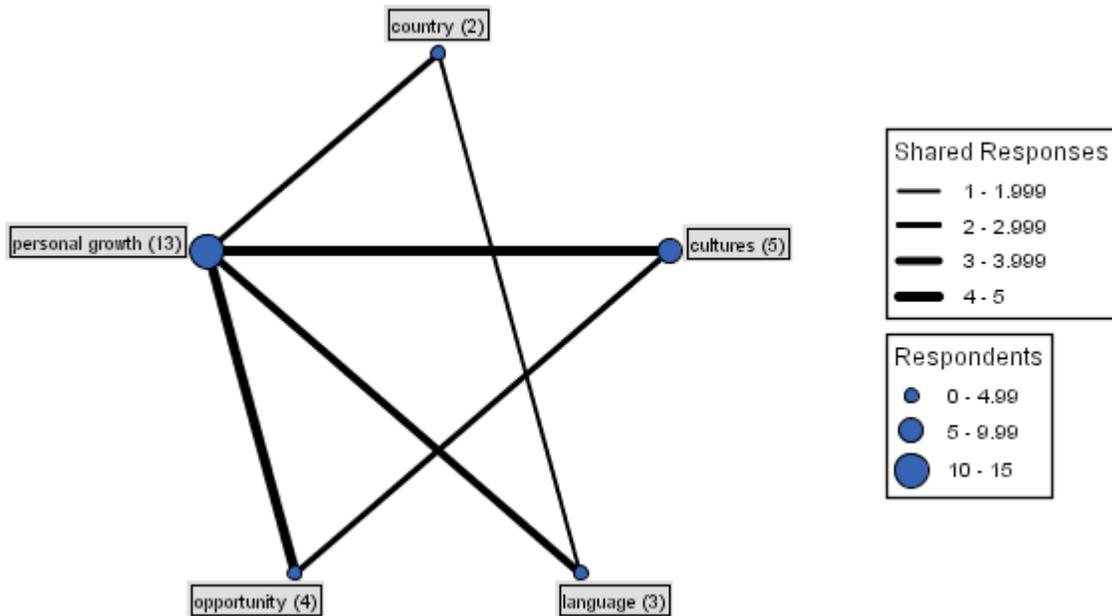
Question No. 2:

Why did you decide to participate in a study abroad program?

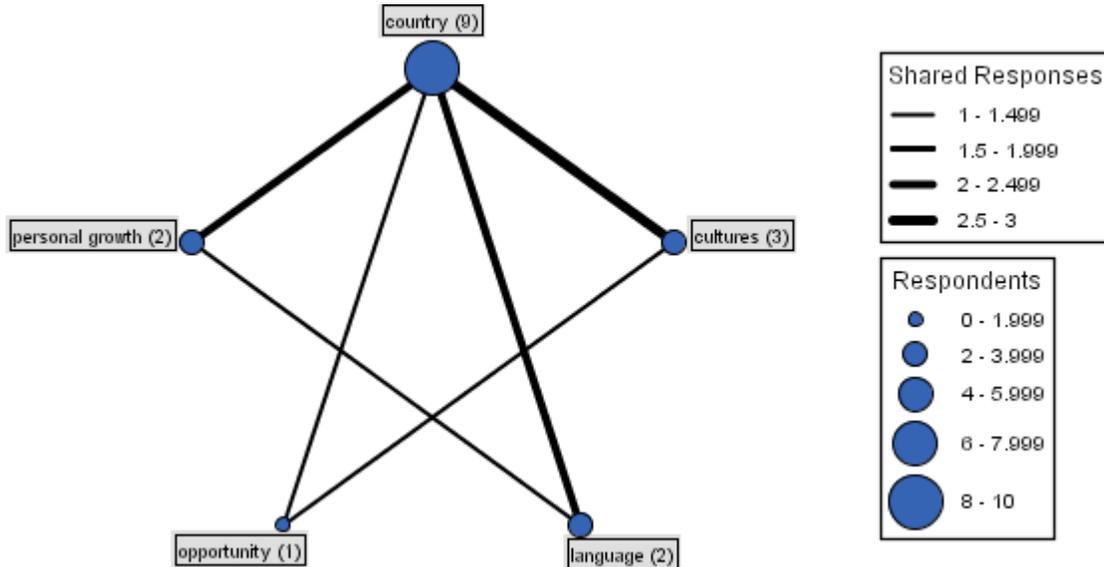
There were no major differences in the reasons students gave for participating in a study abroad program between Spring 2009 and Fall 2008. Mainly, students chose to go abroad because they saw an opportunity for personal growth. The responses given by students were categorized as follows:

1. *Personal Growth*: captures all responses where students maintained that they participated in this program to have a different experience and learn from it.
2. *Culture*: in this category, students' responses maintained that the main reason for living abroad was to experience a culture different from the one they were use to.
3. *Country*: includes all responses whereby students justified the study abroad country choice as having previous interest and knowledge about the country.
4. *Opportunity*: captures all responses where students stated that they enrolled in the program because the opportunity was available to them
5. *Language*: in this category, students maintained that they decided to go abroad with the goal to learn or improve a foreign language.

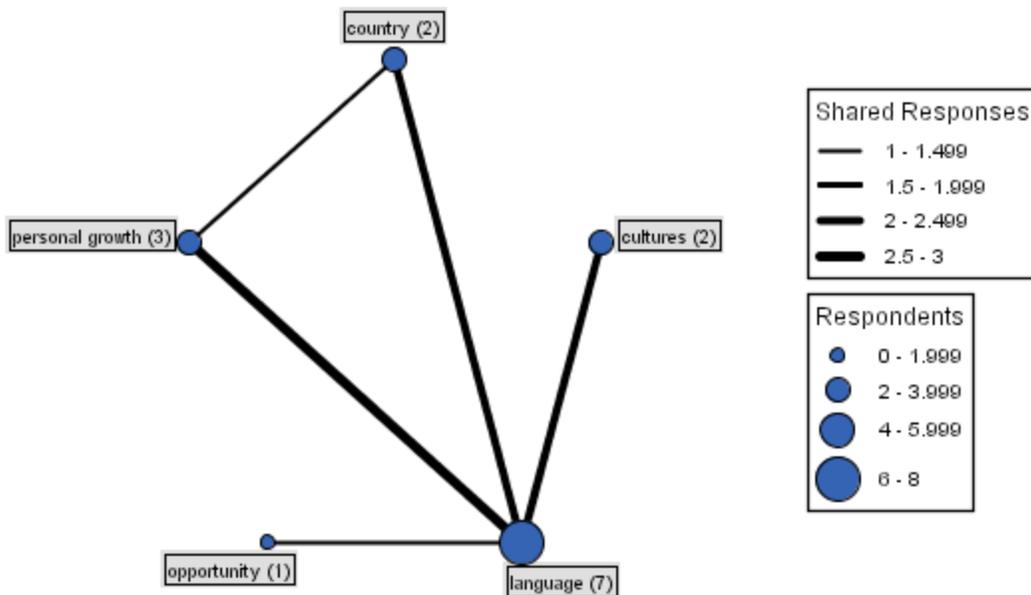
From all the reasons students gave for enrolling in a study abroad program, there were two that stood out above the rest, *personal growth* and living in a *different culture* (both with 39%). Students maintained that living abroad was to achieve personal growth and living in an unfamiliar culture. Personal growth was also related to the *opportunity* USF gives students for participating in a study abroad program. Students' (31%) stated that the combined opportunity and personal growth made them want to engage in a study abroad program.



Country choice was the second most important reason for participation whereby 27% of the students confirmed that the main reason to enroll in a study abroad program was their interest in living in a specific country or continent for which they had previous knowledge. Students explained they knew, before enrolling in the program, they wanted to go to a specific part of the world: 33% maintained they wanted to experience the *culture*, 22% said they wanted to learn the *language*, or to improve the skills they already had in a language, and another 22% said they thought they could achieve some *personal growth*. Many students said they always wanted to go to Europe or Latin America, while others were more specific and said they were specifically interested in Brazil, England, Italy, Hungary or Scotland.



Finally, the opportunity to learn or improve *language* skills was a strong influence in deciding to enroll a study abroad program, 21% of the responses maintained this was the main reason to going abroad. Students justified their interest in learning or improving a language skill (43%) as a way of gaining *personal growth*.



Question No. 3:

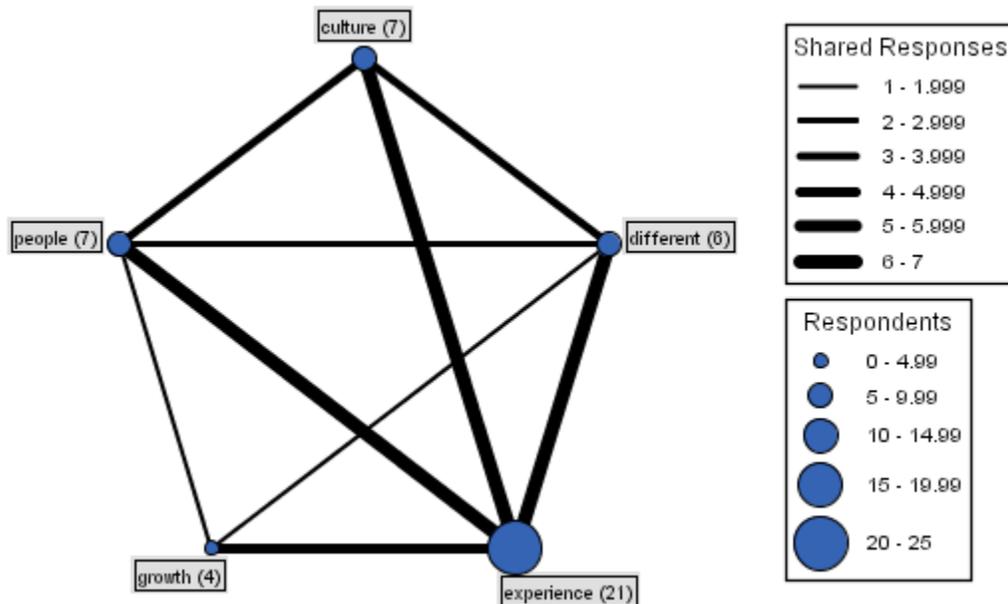
Upon reflection, what would you tell another student at USF who is considering participating in a study abroad experience as to what they can expect from such an experience?

Most students in this question would highly recommend the study abroad program to future students. There was a general consensus study abroad was a challenging experience even while some students reported negative comments. Students agreed that the study abroad program was a positive and a useful experience as a whole. The categories they described on what to expect from living abroad were defined as follows:

1. *Experience*: captures all responses that recommend others enroll in a program because of its positive effect on them.
2. *Different*: includes all responses where students point out the differences about living abroad and gave some advices about how to deal with these differences.
3. *People*: this category highlights the people students met in the study abroad country and how much they helped make study abroad a good experience.
4. *Culture*: captures the advantages and disadvantages of living in a different culture.
5. *Growth*: includes the responses where students recommend study abroad as a way to achieve personal growth.

The relationships among the categories above as to what future students could expect from a study abroad program were as follows:

Students that participated in a study abroad program (72%) expressed it was a worthwhile *experience* and encouraged future students to go abroad. Among the characteristics they highlighted were the *people* and *culture* of the study abroad country. Students (33%) maintained that others will have a positive impact from meeting and interacting with people of other cultures. Another 33% of the responses stated that becoming part of a new culture will give students a greater understanding of different societies and making their experience more unique. At the same time, 19% of the students recommended the potential personal growth that can be achieved should not be underestimated.



On the other hand, 57% of all responses in this question warned future students about the *different* environment they will be living in. From all the surveyed students that highlighted the differences they had to face, 42% said that living in *cultures* and interacting with *people* different from them was difficult. However, dealing with these situations helped them to understand different perspectives, learn from these situations; and overall made for a more valuable experience.

