

# Study Abroad Survey Analysis

## Fall 2007, Spring 2008, Fall 2008 and Spring 2009

### Overview

During the last four semesters (Fall 2007, Spring 2008, Fall 2008 and Spring 2009), the Study Abroad Impact Survey (SAIS) was submitted to current Study Abroad (SA) students, analyzing the following three open-ended questions:

- 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?

The study has been done separately for the semesters of Fall 2008 and Spring 2009, but the present report has the responses combined for the four semesters. Each question was analyzed for common language text, and categories were created to quantify the students' perceptions. Categories described herein are the same we use for the Spring 2009 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 110 written responses. Of these 110 responses, 98 responded to our above first question (89%); 105 responded to our second question (95%); and 104 responded to our third question (95%.) Additionally, the percentage distribution by semester was 21 for Fall 2007 (19%), 22 for Spring 2008 (20%), 31 for Fall 2008 (28%), and 361 for Spring 2009 (33%).

Overall, students indicated 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***

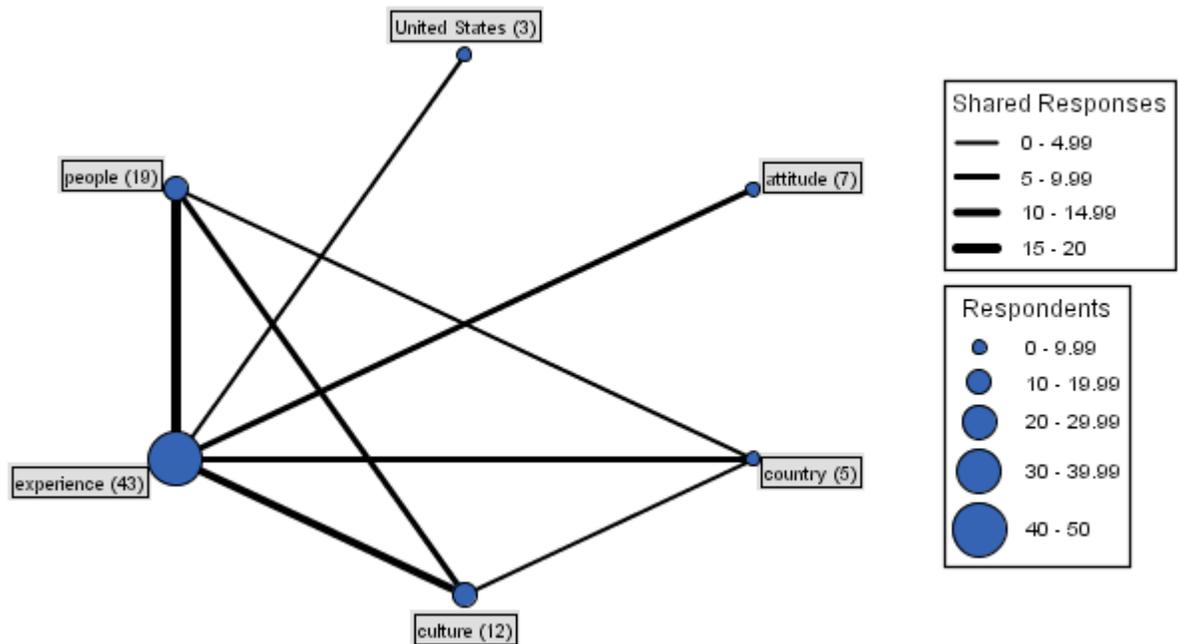
For this question, students talked about their study abroad experience and different aspects that affected their attitudes, values and behaviors. Students replied that participating in a study abroad program was a life changing experience and responded in similar patterns that can be categorized as follows:

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.

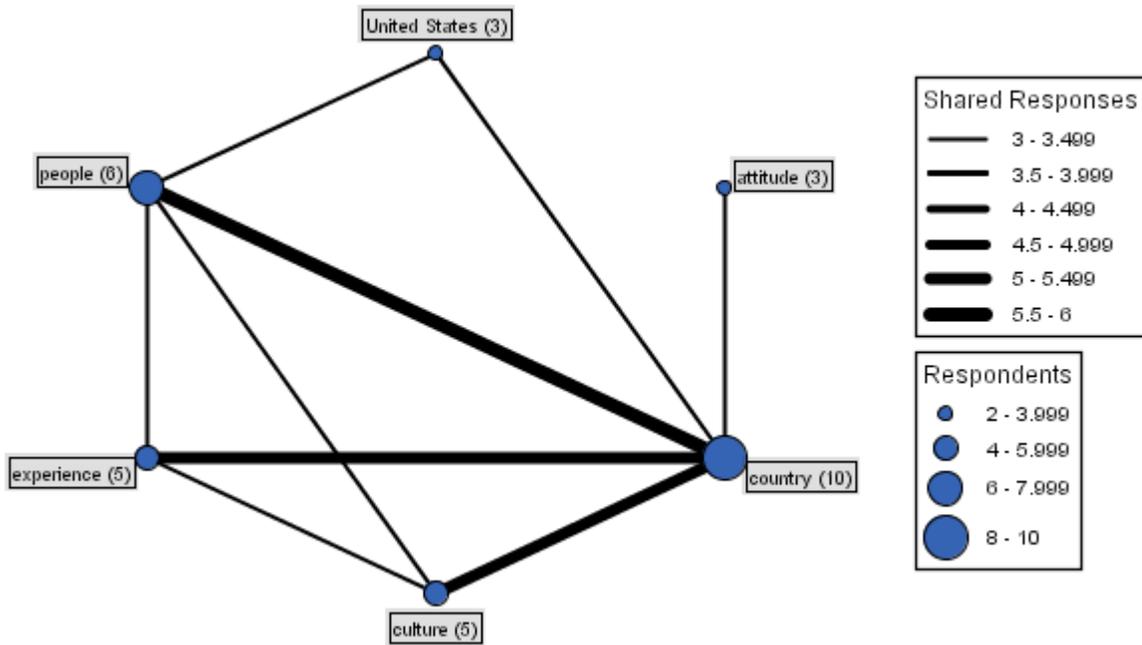
6. *United States*: in this category students' responses referred to differences in values and beliefs between the United States and their study abroad country.

The relationship among these six categories was analyzed as follows:

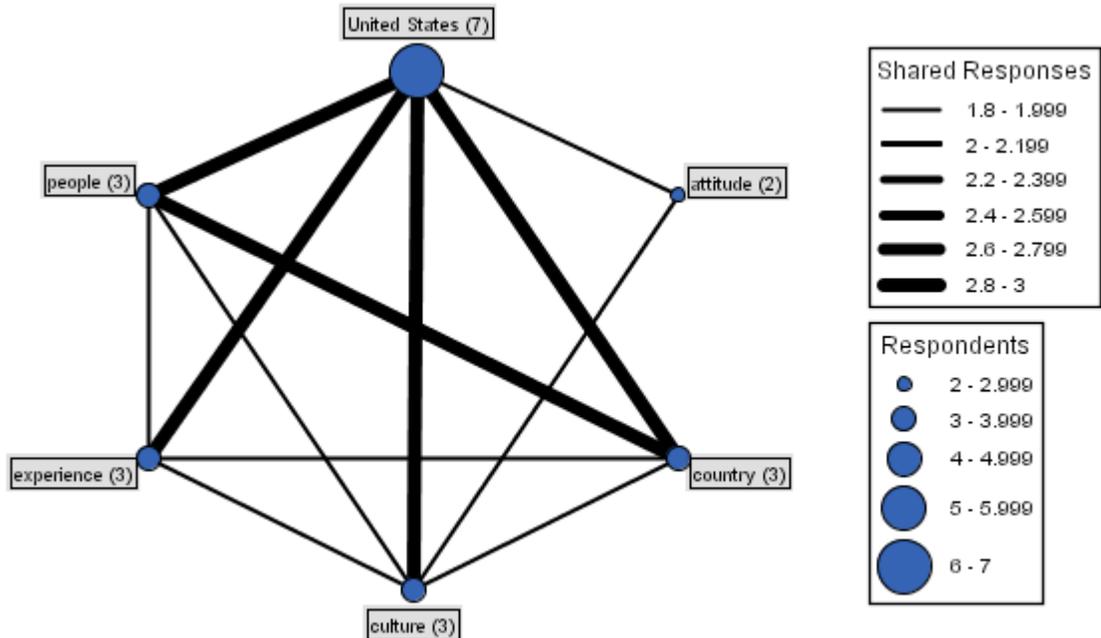
Study Abroad *experience* was the single largest reason mentioned by students for changes in attitude, values or behaviors with 39% of the question respondents indicating that the whole experience changed their attitudes, values, and/or behaviors. *Experience* also has a large relationship with country *culture* where 28% 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* (44%) 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, 9% 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 60% of the responses maintained the people with whom they interacted as the most significant contributor. Likewise, 50% stated that country culture made students' study abroad experience more valuable and interesting.



Many study abroad countries had a strong impact on students where 6% 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, 43% 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*.



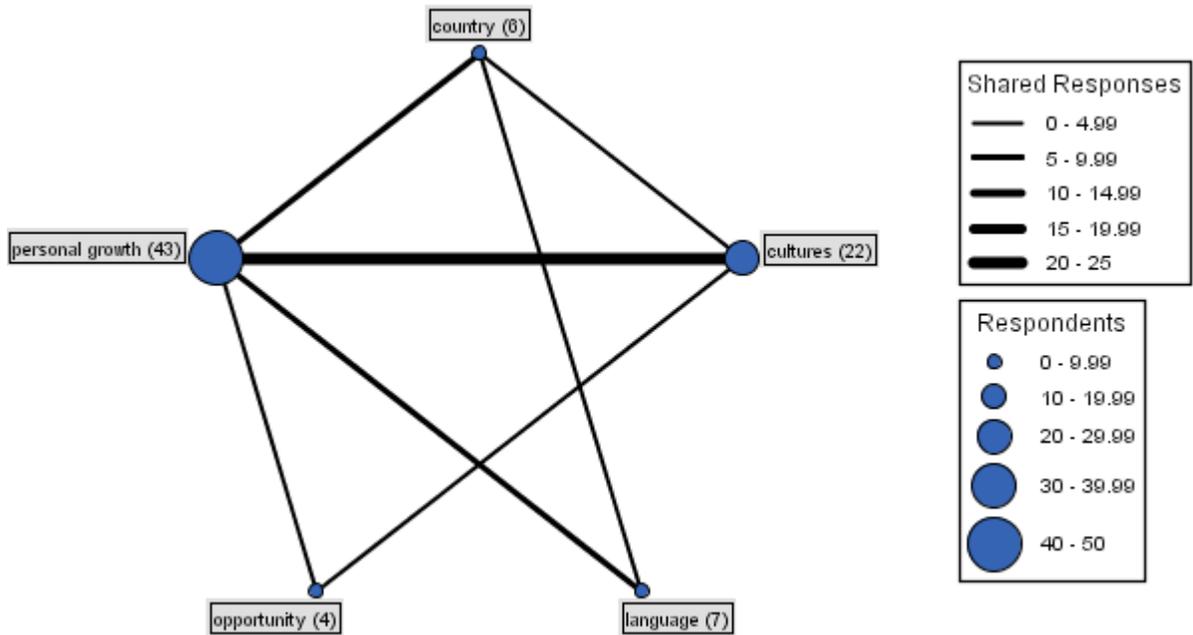
**Question No. 2:**

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

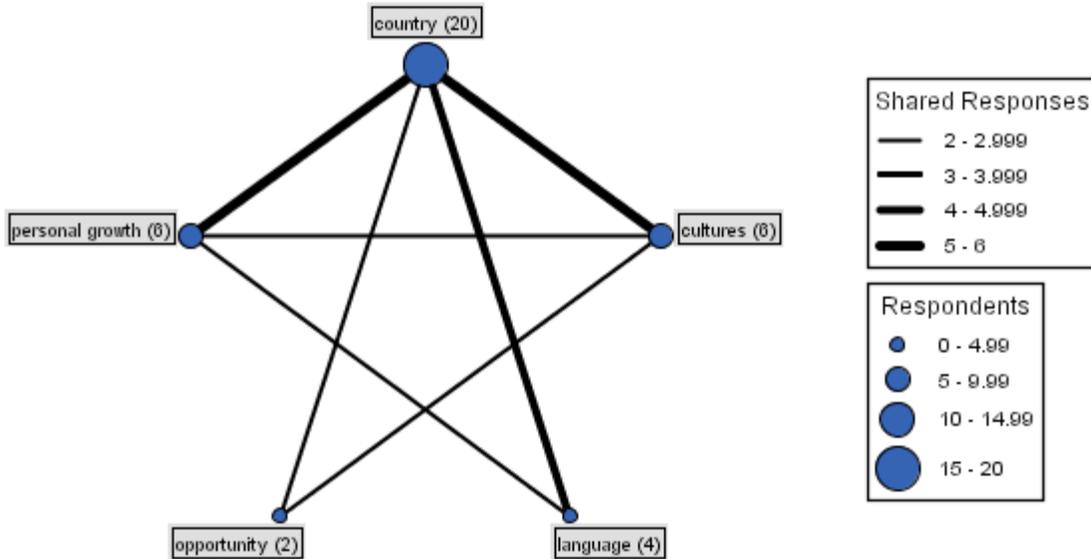
In this question, students maintained that they chose to go abroad because they saw an opportunity for personal growth. The responses given by students were categorized as follows:

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.

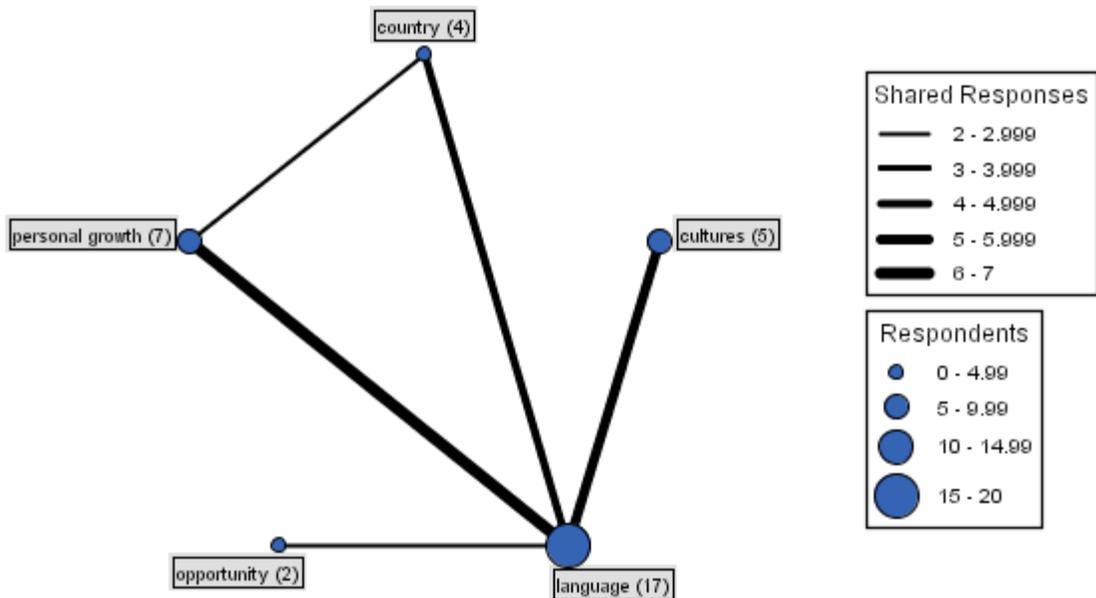
From all the reasons students gave for enrolling in a study abroad program, there were two that stood out above the rest, living in a *different culture* (40%) and *personal growth* (39%). Students maintained that living abroad was to achieve personal growth and living in an unfamiliar culture. When we look at all the responses for the four semesters, the relationship between *Opportunity* and *Personal growth* is not as strong as it was for the Spring 2009 report. In the latter, personal growth was related to the *opportunity* USF gives students for participating in a study abroad program with 31% of the responses while in the combined report, only 4% showed this relationship.



*Country* choice was the third most important reason for participation whereby 18% 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: 30% maintained they wanted to experience the *culture*, another 22% said they thought they could achieve some *personal growth*, and 20% said they wanted to learn the *language*, or to improve the skills they already had in a language. 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, Ireland, Italy, Hungary or Scotland or Spain.



Finally, the opportunity to learn or improve *language* skills was a strong influence in deciding to enroll a study abroad program, 15% of the responses maintained this was the main reason to going abroad. Students justified their interest in learning or improving a language skill (41%) as a way of gaining *personal growth*.





On the other hand, 21% 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, 52% said that interacting with *people* different from them was challenging and 35% said that living in *cultures* was difficult, too. However, dealing with these situations helped them to understand different perspectives, learn from these situations; and overall made for a more valuable experience.

