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Survey on Study Abroad: Data from 600 UNF Freshmen

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As our world becomes more interconnected it is becoming increasingly important for the effectiveness of our future leaders to be experienced in and aware of the challenges to be faced when interacting with people from other cultures. Our current administration in Washington, DC, recognizes that

“In today’s complex and rapidly changing marketplace, our collective and individual prosperity rely increasingly on political, economic, and social cooperation that transcend traditional notions and cultural barriers...” (George W. Bush.)

“International education prepares our citizens to live, work, and compete in the global economy, and promotes tolerance and the reduction of conflict” (Colin Powell.)

The importance of understanding one’s own cultural values and biases is an important aspect for fostering an understanding of the different values and biases of others.

Long considered to be one of the most valuable single experiences a student can have, studying abroad is becoming more popular. The impacts of an international experience stretch beyond the areas of academic success and career development and are seen as being profoundly influential on personal development and intercultural awareness (Dwyer, 2005). Studies have shown increases in self efficacy (Brenner, 2004), self esteem (Juhasz, 1988), self awareness (Jurgens, 2004), development of a

global perspective (McCabe, 1994), creativity (Gurman, 1989), openness to diversity (Wortman, 2003), in interest levels of international political concern, cross-cultural interest, and cultural cosmopolitanism (Carlson, 1988) etc etc.

Graduate schools and employers view favorably individuals with foreign experience (Herberger, 2003). It is felt that these individuals are equipped with the adaptive skills to react to new situations and ambiguities and are willing to learn and try new things.

The experience of studying abroad is not always easy. The problems of being away from friends and family, the difficulties of communication and the misunderstandings that are often an inherent part of a cross-cultural interaction are well documented (Hechanova-Alampay, 2002; Ryan, 2000; Savicki, 2004). The term “culture-shock” expresses the problems of adjustment in a different culture. However, it is exactly the coping mechanisms employed to deal with these aspects that are often cited as the factors that instigate the improvements in students self-efficacy. The increase in confidence a student feels when having faced and solved such problems away from their usual support group and often having to incorporate new solutions is invaluable.

In light of the known benefits and the increasing importance of an international study experience, the UNF International Center has been investigating and offering more opportunities for Study Abroad. In the fall of 2004, the Director of the International Center, Dr. Tim Robinson, wished to investigate the level of interest of UNF freshman and sophomore students in studying abroad. He had the idea of conducting a survey to learn more about their previous experiences abroad and their attitudes towards Study Abroad Courses. Dominik Güss and Emma Glencross developed a first draft of the survey. Upon modification, a final survey was developed by the International Center. The “Survey on Study Abroad” consists of 11 questions addressing

- Personal Information
- International Travel Experience
- Study Abroad Interests

The final form of the survey (Attachment A) was distributed in University housing by Resident Assistants at their February 2005 monthly meeting. In total, 1480 surveys were distributed in the first year communities. 648 surveys were completed and returned to the International Center that constitutes a very high return rate of 43.8%.

Data was input by staff of the International Center and by members of Dr Güss's cultural/cognitive psychology research team (Dominik Güss, Emma Glencross, and Lisa Wills). Data analysis was conducted by Dominik Güss, Emma Glencross and Lisa Wills using the SPSS program; a statistical software package.

Results

A total of 648 students completed the survey of which 600 were freshmen (92.6%) and 48 were sophomores and juniors (7.4%). It was decided to continue the analysis on just the freshmen students, as they constituted the majority of the respondents. Restricting the analysis allowed us to focus on one particular group of students and strengthened the

validity of our interpretations and generalizations.

The focus of the first part of the report is on descriptive statistics i.e. the frequencies of students' answers. In the second part, inferential statistics are calculated to investigate students' attitudes and experiences related to study abroad.

a) Descriptive Statistics

Personal Information (Question 1 to 5)

The average age of the freshmen was 18.4 years of age. 60% were female and 40% were male. Most of the freshmen were white (79%), 11% were black, 5% were Hispanic, 1.7% identified themselves as Asian/ Pacific Islander, 0.3% were of American Indian/Native Alaskan heritage, and 1.2% of the participants indicated multiple race identification. 1.6% of participants did not answer this question.

Of the 600 freshmen, 278 (46.3%) have a passport and 320 (53.4%) do not have a passport.

→ *The typical participant in this survey is an 18 year- old white freshman*

Main Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent
1. Age	Mean age 18.4 years (SD=.52)		
	17	7	1.2
	18	356	59.3
	19	235	39.2
	20	2	0.3
2. Gender	Male	242	40.3
	Female	358	59.7
3. Class	Freshmen	600	92.6
4. Race/Ethnicity	White	474	79.0
	Black	67	11.2
	Hispanic	30	5.0
	American Indian/Native Alaskan	2	0.3
	Asian/Pacific Islander	10	1.7
	Two races (or at least biracial)	7	1.2
	No answer	10	1.6
5. Do you have a passport?	Yes	278	46.3
	No	320	53.4
	No answer	2	0.3

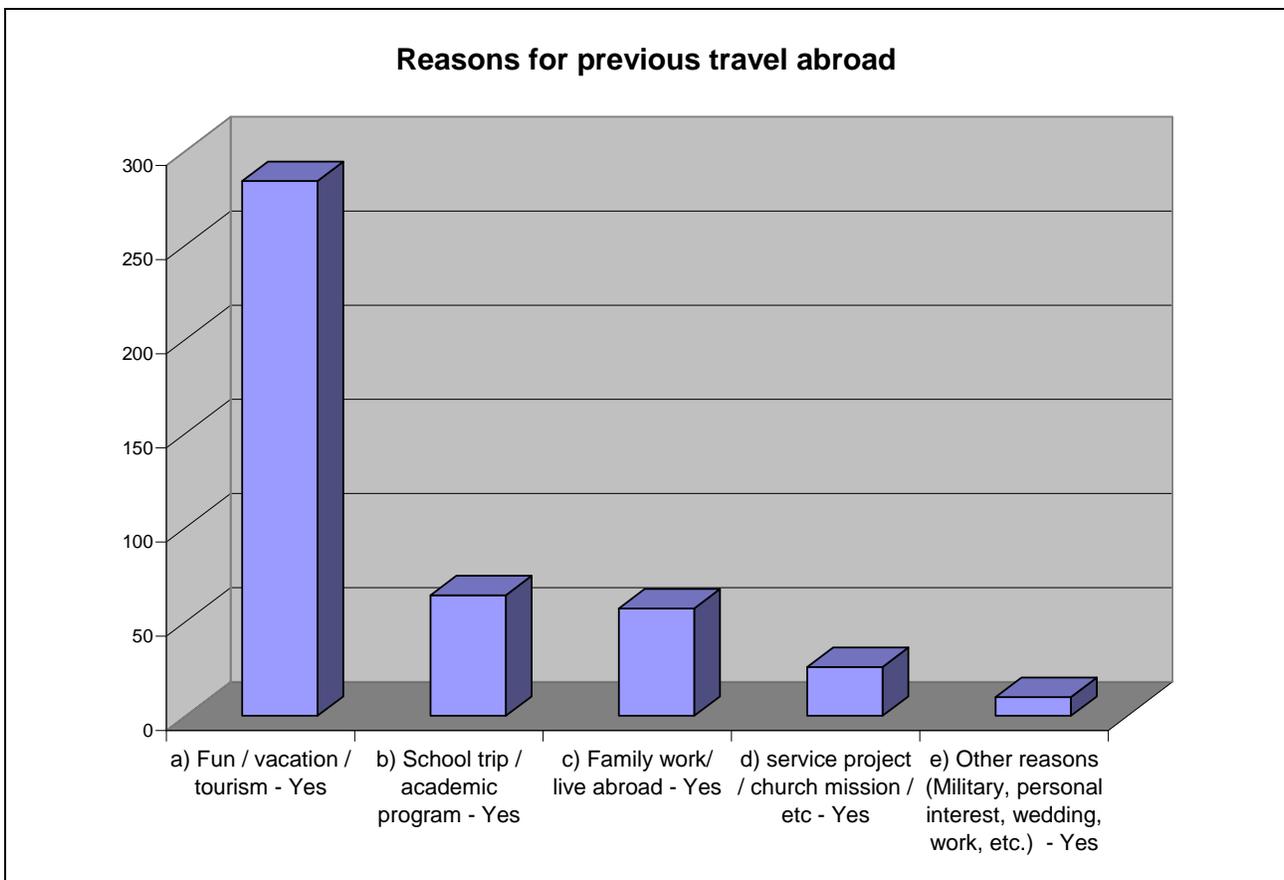
International Travel Experience (Question 6 and 7)

299 Freshman or 50% of the students, have previously been abroad. The majority said they traveled for fun or a vacation (47.3%). 10.7% traveled for school, 9.5% because a family member worked abroad, 4.3% did projects or a mission work, and 1.7% mentioned other reasons.

→ *Less than half of the participants had been abroad. More than half of those mention “fun or vacation” as the primary reason for their trips.*

Many students have been to more than one country. The most frequent destination mentioned was Europe (139 times mentioned) followed by the Caribbean/Bahamas/Central America (102). Other frequently mentioned countries were Mexico (47), Canada (37), South America (15), Asia (14), Australia/New Zealand (5), Africa (6), and 12 students mentioned having traveled to more than 2 countries.

→ *Almost 40% have been to Europe, about 25% to the Caribbean/Bahamas/Central America, and about 25% to either Mexico or Canada.*



Main Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent
6. If you previously have traveled abroad, why? (participants chose several options) (N=600)	a) Fun / vacation / tourism - Yes	284	47.3
	b) School trip / academic program - Yes	64	10.7
	c) Family work/ live abroad - Yes	57	9.5
	d) service project / church mission / etc - Yes	26	4.3
	e) Other reasons (Military, personal interest, wedding, work, etc.) - Yes	10	1.7
7. Where have you traveled abroad? (some mentioned several countries) (N=596)	Canada	37	4.9
	Mexico	47	6.2
	Caribbean/Bahamas/Central America	102	13.4
	South America	15	2.0
	Europe	139	18.2
	Africa	6	0.8
	Middle East	4	0.5
	Asia	14	1.8
	Australia/New Zealand	5	0.6
	More than two other countries	12	1.6
Never Abroad	301	50.1	

Study Abroad Interests (Questions 8 to 11)

387 freshmen said they were interested in studying abroad (64.5%), and 213 said they were not (35.5%). 97 (16.2%) students indicated preference for traveling abroad for 4 weeks or less, 128 (21.4%) indicated a preference for a six week summer term. 94 (15.7%) would like to stay one semester and 20 (3.3%) indicated one year as a desirable time period. 52 students (8.7) marked several choices on the length of their preferred study abroad.

--> *Results indicate that about two thirds of the students who answered this question prefer a short study abroad program of 4 or 6 weeks.*

Students were asked to indicate when they would choose to study abroad. Many students marked several options (474 answers were given by 391 freshmen meaning that every student marked 1.2 answers on

average). The preferred choices were during a summer (168) and during the junior year (144). 92 students indicated preference for the sophomore year, 43 students would like to study abroad as soon as possible (ASAP), and 27 would prefer traveling during the senior year.

→ *About one third of the students would prefer to study abroad during the summer, and another third during the junior year.*

The most frequent reasons mentioned as a motivation for study abroad were Cultural Experience (323 or 53.8%) and Personal Enrichment (263 - 43.8%). The third most frequent reason mentioned was Language Study (153 or 25.5%) followed by Studying Academic Subject in Specific Location abroad (100 or 16.7%). A few students (80 or 13.3%) realize the practical or work importance of a study abroad program and indicated résumé or employment as a motivation for studying abroad. 29 (4.8%)

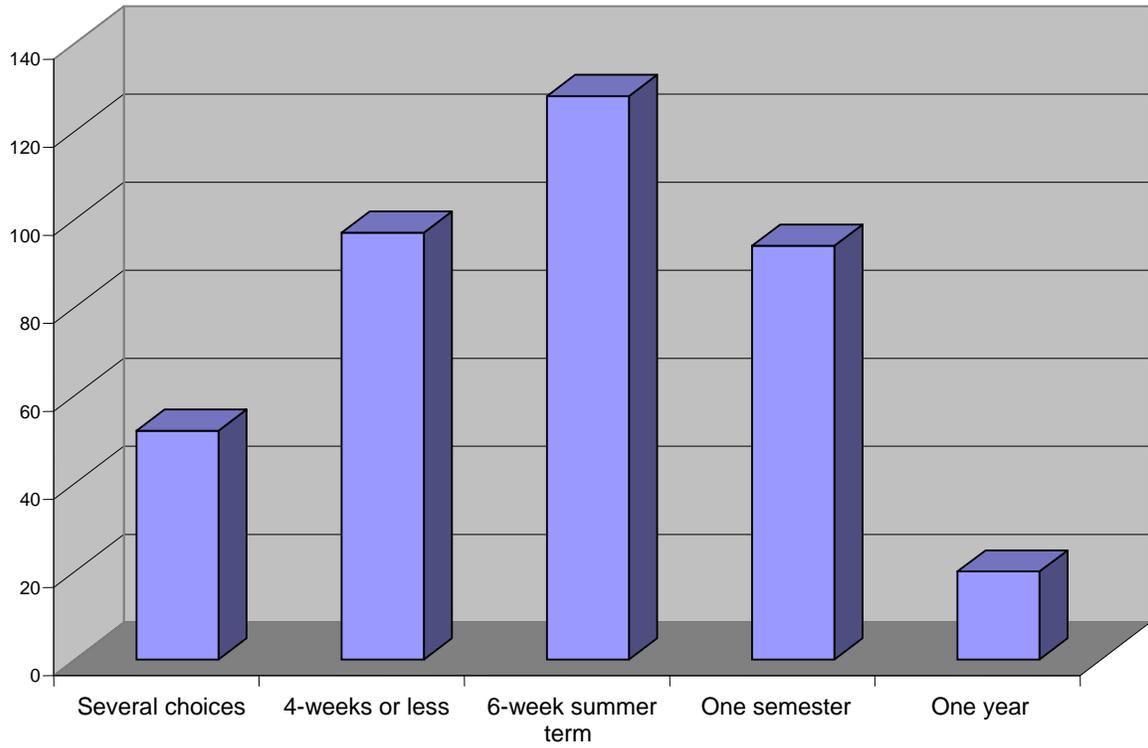
students mentioned other reasons such as music, political interest, soccer, photography, or friends abroad.

→ *The main motivations for studying abroad were (in order of frequency) Cultural Experience, Personal Enrichment, and Language Study.*

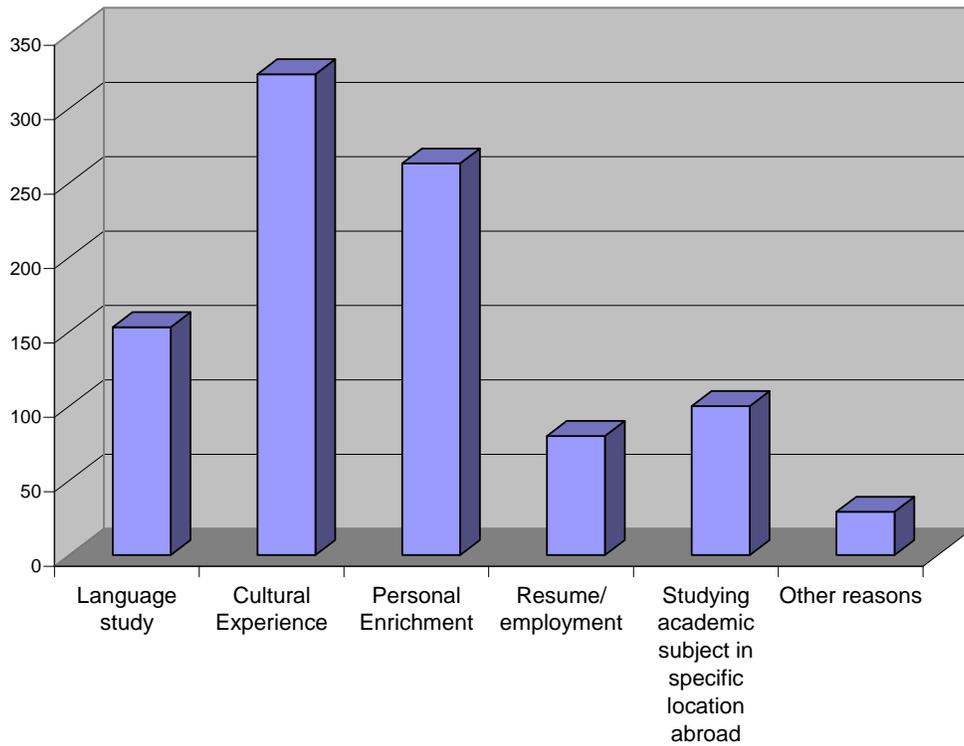
Participants were given the option to give their name, Email address, and phone number in order to remain in contact with the International Center about future study abroad options. About half of the participants gave their name (279 - 46.5%), their Email (245 - 40.8%), their Phone numbers (212 - 35.3%), and 5 students gave additional comments.

Main Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent
8. Are you interested in Studying Abroad?	Yes	387	64.5
	No	213	35.5
9. For how long?	Several choices	52	8.7
	4-weeks or less	97	16.2
	6-week summer term	128	21.4
	One semester	94	15.7
	One year	20	3.3
	No answer	209	34.8
	10. When? (some students marked several choices)	a) ASAP	43
b) Sophomore		92	12.6
c) Junior		144	19.9
d) Senior		27	3.6
e) Some Summer		168	23.2
No answer		211	35.1
11. Which of these best characterizes your interest(s) in Study Abroad? Please check as many as apply.	a) Language study – Yes	153	25.5
	b) Cultural Experience – Yes	323	53.8
	c) Personal Enrichment – Yes	263	43.8
	d) Resume/ employment – Yes	80	13.3
	e) Studying academic subject in specific location abroad - Yes	100	16.7
	f) Other reasons (e.g. music, political interest, soccer, photography, friend abroad) – Yes	29	4.8
Additional information	Name – yes	279	46.5
	Email – yes	245	40.8
	Phone – yes	212	35.3
	Other comments – yes	5	0.8

How long would you like to study abroad? (N=474)



Interest in Study Abroad (N=948)



Inferential Statistics

a) Ethnicity

The comparisons regarding ethnicity only refer to “Caucasian”, “African American”, “Latino”, and “Asian American /Pacific Islander” as those were the most frequent categories. No significant differences between ethnicities were found (alpha level p

$< .05$) regarding the questions “How many have been abroad?”, “Are you interested in Studying Abroad?”, “Where have you traveled abroad?”, and “Reasons for previous trips abroad?” Frequency tables including the categories with a frequency larger than 10 are shown in the following tables. Results have to be interpreted with caution as the majority of participants were white (79%).

		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pac Island	Total
	Total	474	69	35	12	590
How long?	0	164	30	6	6	206
	several choices	41	5	3	1	50
	4 weeks or less	76	11	5	1	93
	6 weeks	100	11	13	4	128
	one semester	77	9	7	0	93
	one year	16	3	1	0	20
Study Abroad Interest	No	166	31	8	6	211
	Yes	308	38	27	6	379
11. Which of these best characterizes your interest(s) in Study Abroad? Please check as many as apply.	a) Language study - Yes	117	19	23	4	163
	b) Cultural Experience - Yes	256	31	23	6	316
	c) Personal Enrichment - Yes	200	31	22	4	257
	d) Resume/ employment - Yes	65	7	5	2	79
	e) Studying academic subject in specific location abroad - Yes	82	12	4	1	99
	f) Other reasons (e.g. music, political interest, soccer, photography, friend abroad) - Yes	24	2	0	1	27

b) Gender

In total, 242 male and 358 female freshmen answered the questions. Chi-square tests were calculated comparing male and female students regarding all questions asked. Women were significantly more interested in study abroad than men, $\chi^2 (1, N = 600) =$

28.99, $p < .001$. Women would like to spend more time abroad than men, $\chi^2 (5, N = 600) = 22.51, p < .001$.

		Male	Female
Study Abroad Interest	No	125	103
	Yes	138	282

c) How many have been abroad and show no interest in Study Abroad?

Those that have been abroad show significantly more interest in studying abroad, $\chi^2(1, N = 600) = 6.31, p = .012$.

		Previous traveled abroad Yes	Previous traveled abroad No
Study Abroad Interest?	No	88	123
	Yes	204	185

Discussion

Summary of Findings

In total, 600 surveys of freshmen regarding international travel experiences and study abroad interests were analyzed. The typical participant in this survey was an 18 year-old white freshman.

Slightly less than half of the freshmen have been abroad. More than half of those mention “fun or vacation” as the primary reason for their trip. Almost 40% have been to Europe, about 25% to the Caribbean/Bahamas/Central America, and about 25% to either Mexico or Canada. Half of the freshmen are interested in study abroad. Women are more interested than men and they would also like to stay longer abroad than men. About two thirds of those freshmen who are interested in study abroad would prefer a short study abroad program of 4 or 6 weeks. About one third of the students would prefer to study abroad during the summer, and another third during the junior year. The main motivations for studying abroad were, in order of frequency mentioned, Cultural Experience, Personal Enrichment, and Language Study. Most participants showed interest in staying in contact with the UNF International Center.

Open Questions

As a researcher one would like to gather as much information as possible. However, practical concerns and willingness of participants have to be taken into consideration. Many other questions could have been addressed in a three-page questionnaire but that would definitively have been too long and may have reduced the number of surveys being completed.

Looking at the results of the Study Abroad Interests section, it may seem surprising that most of the students wish to study abroad for only a short period of time, yet they mention as their primary motivations cultural experience, personal enrichment, and language study. It may be difficult to realize these aspects in such a short period of time. These results however are consistent with current trends that show more students choosing shorter length international experiences. Traditionally it was viewed that the longer experiences were more beneficial than the shorter ones, with a one-year experience being seen as the most valuable. It is questionable if students can really get an enriching cultural experience in a program of about 4 to 6 weeks. The benefits of these programs can be seen in the flexibility derived by being able to choose to study a particular

subject in a specific location (Jurgens, 2004). A program can then be designed, directed, and accompanied by a resident faculty member as an integral part of a particular class. The true benefits of inter- and intra-personal development and intercultural and career advancement seem to become evident in those programs that exceed 6 weeks in duration (Dwyer, 2005)

It certainly depends on the program. Integration of students into local families, opportunities to interact with people abroad on a daily basis, and the participation in local classes have been discussed as valuable components of any foreign experience.

While a longer stay may be more beneficial and give a richer experience there are organizational problems related to such longer stays. Faculty members from UNF are often unable or unwilling to spend such extended times abroad and so such programs would need to be coordinated with partner universities overseas. UNF currently offers several such exchange programs in a variety of countries such as France, China, and Morocco.

Currently research is being undertaken to track the experiences of foreign students at UNF and to map out the changes in perspective and understanding that occur during a cross-cultural experience (Glencross, in preparation). An interesting finding emerging from the survey is that those who have been abroad show significantly more interest in studying abroad. It seems that students who have had valuable and enriching experiences abroad are more interested in having more experiences.

Limitations

This study was based on a survey that was completed by freshman students who are residents in the UNF dorms. Therefore this study population was demographically restricted. It does not include non-resident students or students in the later college years. Additional information about which aspects of studying abroad are discouraging would be

interesting. UNF has a large number of commuter students who may have family and work obligations that cannot be easily put aside for studying abroad. Economic issues may also play a large role in the interest level of potential travelers. The possibility of scholarships and financial assistance may have some effect on raising the interest level. Further information on the students at UNF who have studied abroad and how well their experiences have been shared or publicized to the rest of the student body would provide insight into the general knowledge of students at UNF about the experience of “studying abroad”.

Implications

The sample size of 600 is large and can be regarded as representative of the resident freshman students. Information about international travel experience and Study Abroad interests of these students will be relevant for the International Center of UNF and its mission to develop and promote opportunities for international experiences for UNF students in order to prepare them to be globally competent graduates/citizens. The data received provides good evidence of interest among this student population subset and argues for continued expansion of Study Abroad experiences for UNF students. It also demonstrates that study abroad at UNF could be an important item to include in recruiting and other UNF promotional materials. Finally, since study abroad is of such high interest to this population, providing such international experiences could be a useful retention strategy for the University.

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UNIVERSITY of NORTH FLORIDA – INTERNATIONAL CENTER SURVEY ON STUDY ABROAD

Personal Information – Fill-in blank or check as appropriate:

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: ___M ___F
3. Class: ___ Fresh ___ Soph ___ Jr ___ Sr
4. Race/Ethnicity: ___White ___Black ___Hispanic ___American Indian/Native Alaskan ___Asian/Pac Islander
5. Do you have a passport? ___Yes ___No

International Travel Experience - Please tell us about your international travel experience:

6. If you previously have traveled abroad, why?
 - a. ___ for fun / vacation / tourism?
 - b. ___ school trip / academic program?
 - c. ___ family work / live abroad?
 - d. ___ service project / church mission / etc.?
 - e. ___ other _____
7. Where have you traveled abroad? _____

Study Abroad Interests – Please answer the following about your Study Abroad interests:

8. Are you interested in Studying Abroad? ___ Yes ___ No
9. For how long? a. ___4-weeks or less b. ___6-week summer term c. ___semester d. ___year
10. When? a. ___ASAP b. ___Sophomore year c. ___Junior year d. ___Senior year e. ___Some summer
11. Which of these best characterizes your interest(s) in Study Abroad? Please check as many as apply.
 - a. ___language study b. ___cultural experience c. ___personal enrichment
 - d. ___resume/employment e. ___studying academic subject in specific location abroad
 - f. ___other (explain below):

OPTIONAL: We will soon be putting together Focus Groups for in-depth discussion on the above and other topics for those interested in Studying Abroad. If you would like to participate, please list your full name, email address and Housing phone number in the space below. We will contact you shortly.

(name)

(e-mail)

(phone)

**If you have other comments to make on Study Abroad, please write them on the back of this paper.
THANK YOU!**