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## Connecting Future Teachers to Study Abroad

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Connecting Future Teachers to Study Abroad

By

Kyle J. Crimi

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Master of Arts

In

Teaching

Minnesota State University-Mankato

November 2012

## Abstract

This study investigated the perceived benefits and barriers that impact study abroad for pre-service teachers and how participation might be increased. The literature review found that students have positive perceptions towards study abroad and that there are benefits for teachers who participate in study abroad. It also revealed that many barriers exist towards study abroad and that addressing financial concerns and having faculty support and encourage study abroad would help increase participation. A survey was designed for first year pre-service teachers at MNSU-Mankato to understand the pre-service teachers' perceptions towards study abroad, the barriers that they have towards study abroad, and what they believe can be done to increase study abroad participation. The survey results demonstrated that pre-service teachers do have a positive perception toward study abroad and that financial concerns and lack of knowledge are barriers to study abroad. The research suggests that addressing financial concerns and educating pre-service teachers on the benefits of study abroad could increase study abroad participation.

DATE: November 09, 2012

This paper is submitted as part of the required work in the Department of Educational Studies, K-12 and Secondary Programs, KSP 610, Scholarly Writing, at Minnesota State University-Mankato, and has been supervised, examined, and accepted by the professor.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Diversity within a classroom brings different challenges due to language, culture, prejudices and racism, and perceptions. These challenges do not only arise because of diversity among the students, some of the challenges arise from the teachers. These challenges, if not approached correctly, can have a very negative impact on a classroom. For this reason, it is important for all teachers to be trained well so that they are able to understand themselves and their perceptions, as well as being able to understand the cultures of students and their different backgrounds and perspectives.

If a teacher can effectively manage the diversity in the classroom, it can be a very beneficial learning tool. Kurlaender (2006) states that benefits of diverse classrooms can be summed up in four categories: enhanced learning, long-term educational and occupational gains, increased social interaction, and improved attitudes and citizenship. Coleman (2006) agrees that if diversity is managed effectively, it will promote cross-racial understanding, break down racial stereotypes, enable students to better understand persons of different races, enhance classroom discussion, promote better learning outcomes, and better prepare students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society. All teachers can have the opportunity to expose their students to these benefits in the classroom.

There is currently a great emphasis on being able to teach diverse student populations, but some research claims that teachers are still not adequately prepared to

teach in diverse classrooms. Pohan, Ward, Kouzekanani, and Boatright (2009) concluded that “it seems that not all pre-service teachers who successfully complete a teacher certification program are adequately prepared to handle the differing social, economic, and political realities affecting their students” (p. 49). Pre-Service teachers go through extensive classes and experiences attempting to learn how to address challenges of diversity in the classroom, but another researcher stated that “although many multicultural experiences were built into the program, the students did not internalize them to the point that they could articulate them as they went out into their teaching career” (Henkin & Steinmetz, 2008, p. 107).

Some pre-service teachers agree with this research, that they are not prepared to teach in diverse classrooms. A study found that 59.8% of white pre-service teachers felt they had the ability to teach poor minority students (Ford & Quinn, 2010). Another study found that pre-service teachers that had urban student teaching placements enjoyed their placements, but mentioned that, if given the choice, they would want to work with students that were “urban, but not too urban” (Watson, 2011). This study noted that these pre-service teachers would use the term “urban” to describe diverse races and economic statuses of the students, another possible indicator that they are lacking in the area of cultural awareness. Another study had a similar finding stating that “most students in teacher education programs expressed preferences for teaching students like themselves, and in communities similar to their own” (Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003, p. 9). Pre-Service teachers can also be hesitant about discussing important issues related to diversity. Liggett and Finley (2009) discovered that, for fear of losing their job, “they



[pre-service teachers] would not disrupt the status quo by bringing up or pursuing controversial diversity issues” (p. 36). Another study found that “district administrators shared that they felt many teachers simply carried misunderstandings of their students’ ‘cultures’ or that they did not have proper training in teaching ‘different’ students” (Vaught & Costagno, 2008).

It is especially important that pre-service teachers get proper training because diversity is increasing in the United States at a rapid rate. In 2008, the US Census Bureau released a report that stated, “the nation will be more racially and ethnically diverse. . . by midcentury, according to projections. . . . Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54 percent minority in 2050. By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children.” Due to the fact that diversity is increasing, US classrooms will become even more diverse. Now it is especially important for teachers to be adequately trained so that they can confidently and effectively address some of the challenges that come along with diversity in their classrooms.

Diversity is something that is increasing in our society, but these findings show that teachers are not prepared to address challenges of diversity that exist in classrooms today. A new direction is needed to try to connect pre-service teachers with the skills needed to address diversity; even if that direction takes them down a road less traveled. Pre-Service teachers need to be exposed to something that has a different type of impact on more students.

International study abroad experiences can be what is needed to prepare pre-service teachers to address some of the challenges of diversity in a classroom. Study abroad has been proven to be beneficial in many areas, including increased confidence, appreciation of other cultures and cultural similarities/differences, increased desire to learn about other cultures, and better understanding of one's own culture, language, people, and self (Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Willow, 2009). An international study abroad experience is what is needed to fill the gap between pre-service teachers and diverse classrooms in which they will teach.

#### Statement of the Problem

Study abroad numbers are very low. The national statistics show that in 2008-2009 only 1.36% of students studied abroad. (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2010) The state of Minnesota was slightly better sending 2.20% of students to a study abroad experience. (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2010) Minnesota State University-Mankato (MNSU-Mankato) is again slightly higher at 2.31% of their students studying abroad. (Minnesota State University-Mankato, 2011 & Lindsay, 2010) The Minnesota State University-Mankato College of Education (COE) has done an adequate job compared to state and national levels by recently sending 5.5% of its students to a study abroad experience. (MNSU-Mankato, 2011 & Lindsay, 2010) However, this is a number that can be and needs to be increased. The focus of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceived benefits for studying abroad?
2. What are the barriers that hinder COE students from study abroad?

### 3. What can be done to increase COE students study abroad participation?

#### Importance of the Study

Milner (2006) found that “pre-service teachers rarely enter teacher education courses with any conception of, interest in, or concern about cultural and racial diversity” (p. 351-352). For this reason, this study is important for teacher educators and administration to effectively plan curriculum including study abroad to teach pre-service teachers how to adequately address classroom diversity. This study will provide insight into how pre-service teachers view the importance of study abroad. It also explores some of the barriers that keep students from studying abroad. The study also will explore ways to encourage more students to participate in a study abroad experience. It also explores ways to educate pre-service teachers on the importance and benefits of participating in a study abroad program.

It is important to not only educate our pre-service teachers, but also to guide them through experiences that will help transform them and help them become more culturally aware and capable of addressing challenges of diversity in the classroom, as well as simply helping them become better people than they were when they began their journey of becoming great teachers. Together, if we can do that, I believe that teachers will begin to be able to do the same with their students.

#### Methods

Undergraduate students in their first year in the College of Education at Minnesota State University-Mankato were asked to participate in this study. The surveys were designed by the researcher. After designing the survey, the researcher applied for

approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) to conduct the research. After the IRB approved this research project, an advisor addressed the classes and informed them of the intent of the survey. After informing the participants of the intent of the survey, the researchers collected physical consent forms from the participants and then gave them access to the survey which was located on the website [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The researcher then analyzed the data to try to find any correlations. Using the results of the data, the author determined which benefits and barriers most influenced pre-service teachers perceptions about study abroad. The study also identified possible methods to increase the number of students in the study abroad program.

#### Limitations of the Study

This research is limited because it is a convenience sample. Generalizability is limited because of the sample and replication has not been conducted. Repeated study of would permit researchers to see if the data holds true across contexts. Collaborating with universities hoping to improve study abroad programs for future teachers would help to improve generalizability as well. Economic status may play a part in the results so universities that have students with a different economic status should replicate this survey to get a more accurate idea of the monetary needs of their students with regard to study abroad.

## Definition of Terms

### Cultural Awareness

Someone's cultural awareness is the understanding between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values (Reverso-Softissimo, 2008).

### Diversity

The condition of having or being composed of differing elements (Merriam-Webster, 2011 ).

### International Study Abroad

A program in which students attend school in a country outside the United States and receive academic credit toward their major (Hobsons Inc., 2011).

### Pre-Service Teachers

Students in a teacher education program, at a college or university, preparing for professional-level teaching positions (Education.com, Inc, 2011).

### Minnesota State University-Mankato: College of Education

This includes all first year students studying to become teachers at Minnesota State University-Mankato. (Possible majors include: Business Education, Early Childhood, Elementary Education, K-12 & Secondary Education, and Special Education)

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter One explored the problem that teachers are not sufficiently prepared to teach in diverse classrooms. Teachers need to be part of experiences that teach them about diversity in ways a classroom and student teaching cannot. A possible option for this is an international study abroad experience. “International experiences, where students are immersed in a different cultural context, may address pre-service teachers’ intercultural needs in ways not possible in domestic placements” (Marx & Moss, 2011, p. 36). However, there are very low numbers of pre-service teachers that are involved in study abroad programs. This literature review will discuss some of the research that addresses the questions of this research study: (a) what are the perceived benefits from study abroad, (b) what are the perceived barriers to study abroad, and (c) what are institutions doing to increase study abroad participation. It is most important to start with student perceptions prior to study abroad because we need to understand how students view study abroad before they participate. This is important to understand because it seems that most studies are conducted after study abroad. A student’s perspective is often one of the most noted transformations that occurs during a study abroad.

#### General Perceptions of Study Abroad

A person’s perspective can have a large influence on how they interact in new settings with what is going on around them. Cory and Martinez (2008) suggested “that more attention should be paid to students’ perceptions and expectations prior to

departure” (p. 6). New research (Aglazor, 2010) supports this idea indicating that “learning experiences among pre-service teachers vary greatly depending on the personal perspectives that they bring to the experience” (p. 10). To help pre-service teachers get the most out of a study abroad program, we need to understand the perspective they have going into study abroad so that we can help guide them to a new perspective based upon the experience.

There is a relatively small amount of research discussing how pre-service teachers view study abroad going into a program. This topic is important and hopefully this research will guide others in this research area. In a recent survey conducted in New Zealand (Doyle et al., 2010), 625 respondents discussed how a study abroad program might benefit them. Some of the perceived benefits were they would; 1) get a chance to see if they would like to work or live overseas, 2) attend a prestigious overseas university, be able to list a semester overseas on their CV [resume], 3) have the opportunity to study other subjects not found in their country, 4) have opportunities to pursue sports or cultural interests, 5) compete in their studies at a top-rated university, and 6) have an opportunity to study in their ancestors’ family culture or language. The most important perceived benefit found for 40% of the respondents was that they felt they would be exposed to a different culture or language.

Some may wonder if participants of study abroad already were more inclined to do so because of their previous experiences and beliefs. There is research that implies that this could be possible. Fry et al. (2009, p. 62) believe that the “international seed” is planted prior to college. One staggering finding in a study by Fry et al. (2009) is that 83%

of his study abroad participants had traveled internationally prior to their study abroad program and that 22% had lived abroad for at least six months. These numbers are extremely high and could suggest positive perceptions towards cultural experiences prior to study abroad experience. Stroud (2010) found that “students who [express] that it [is] important to improve their understanding of other countries and cultures have odds of intending to study abroad that are 2 times higher than” those who did not express that it was important. Similarly, Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2008) found that “more diverse interactions had a significant positive effect on the intent to study abroad” (p. 139). These findings suggest that students may have a perception that cultural awareness is important prior to entering into study abroad. Stroud (2010) also found that students that lived more than 100 miles from their homes were also more likely to intend to study abroad than those that lived closer to their homes. Students that live farther from home tend to be more independent which could be a factor in why they are more likely to choose to participate in study abroad programs. It is important that these students that might be more inclined to participate do participate in study abroad, but the purpose of this research is to understand the students who are not inclined so that they too can experience the benefits of study abroad.

Study abroad directors need to do the best job they can at understanding student perspectives and expectations prior to leaving the country because perceptions play a huge role in the success of the study abroad experience. Kim and Goldstein (2005) stated that “students who had unfavorable expectations of study abroad may believe that they have little to gain from experiencing another culture” (p. 274). These researchers



developed the International Study Expectancies Scale to determine unfavorable expectations. Some sample questions from the scale are:

1. Participating in an international study program would build my self-confidence.
2. International study will be stressful (reverse score).
3. I will enjoy studying in a country other than my own.
4. Experiences in my own country can teach me many of the same things one learns through international study (reverse score).
5. Participating in an international study program would allow me to meet interesting people (Kim & Goldsteing, 2005)

Doyle et al. (2010) state that the majority of students understand that exposure to other cultures plays an important role in a study abroad experience, and Kim and Goldstein (2005) recognized that a study abroad experience can be limited by expectations and perspectives. It is important for pre-service teachers to have high expectations for their study abroad experience.

Once we understand pre-service teachers' perspectives, these perspectives can be directed toward a decision to study abroad and toward a view of study abroad as something that is beneficial to them both as individuals and as teachers. When this is done, participants are better prepared to benefit from the new perceptions participants consistently gain of themselves and others during the study abroad experience. The research that is available on the perceived benefits after participating in a study abroad experience is addressed next.

## Perceived Benefits from Study Abroad

There are clear, perceived benefits from study abroad. Fry et al. (2009) released an in-depth study that was conducted on study abroad and its effects on participants. They used a survey, which included 684 participants from six universities from around the United States, as well as in-depth interviews of 53 randomly selected individuals. Some of the participants were recent graduates and some had graduated 5 to 10 years earlier. Many participants stated that “study abroad is life-changing and transformative.” (p.65) This is not an uncommon finding. In fact, several studies discuss how participants claim study abroad was a life-changing experience. (Doyle, 2009; Fry et al., 2009; Nero, 2009) One of the strongest findings from the interviews completed by Fry et al. (2009) was that “many participants believed that study abroad was the best experience they had ever had in their life, and that they felt it should be available to everyone” (p.53). Additionally participants stated it was the “best decision” that they had made. It is very clear that study abroad participant perceptions of their experience is extremely high and should not be overlooked.

Does study abroad really have a long lasting impact on participants? Dwyer (2009) conducted a longitudinal study covering the span of 50 years of 3,723 participants who had participated in a study abroad program. The most important conclusion for the study was that the impact of study abroad “can be sustained over a period of 50 years” (p. 161). The impact that study abroad has on the life of individuals is long lasting.

Researchers often come to the conclusion that study abroad affects students in a few different areas of their lives. It affects their career development, academic

development, personal development, and intercultural development. The research (Clark III, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Cushner, 2007; Dwyer, 2009; Fry et al., 2009; Hadis, 2005) on these effects are generally very positive. One participant stated “it’s really in all aspects of my life it [a study abroad experience] affected positively” (Fry et al., 2009, p.53). It is important to examine each of these aspects to see what research says on each.

First, a major way that study abroad changes the lives of the participants is that it sometimes changes the academic focus or career path of an individual upon returning home. Dwyer (2009) found that 76% of participants claimed that they acquired skills that influenced their career path. Fry et al. (2009) also noted that “numerous interviewees mentioned changing to fields that probably paid less, but enabled them to be in caring occupations (such as . . .teaching), where they could make a difference in the lives of others” (p. 65). Study abroad changes career paths for some, but it also strengthens the career paths of others. In a study (Algazor, 2010) on the impact of pre-service teachers’ experiences in Honduras, the researcher found that multiple participants believed that study abroad strengthened their career choices. These participants indicated that the experience had reinforced their passion for teaching and that some had recommitted themselves to teaching in diverse low income schools, where they felt they could make a difference. In a study by Nero (2009), a study abroad participant indicated that “the impact it [a study abroad experience] will have on my teaching is priceless” (p. 192). This research confirms that study abroad shapes participant’s choices toward teaching as a career.

Second, study abroad has a major impact on participants' focus on their academics and desire for learning. Hadis (2005) conducted a study asking "Why are they better students when they come back?" His research survey included 95 participants that had studied abroad from different universities. Two important findings surfaced. Hadis discovered that 48.9% of the participants agreed that their experience made them more focused on their studies when returning. Also, 53% of participants agreed that when they returned they were studying more for the pleasure of knowing than to get a good grade. By studying for enjoyment and being more focused on studies, students may gain more from their classes. Fry et al. (2009) also found that 63.3% of study abroad participants continued on to pursue advanced degrees [graduate school or higher] which is twice the national average. The 2010 U.S. Census reported that 1.4% of the population has a Ph. D. degree. Dwyer (2004) found that study abroad participants were more than twice (3%) as likely to get their Ph. D. degree and reported that 7% of participants achieved a Ph. D. degree when their study abroad program lasted a year or more. It is clear that study abroad has a large impact on students' desire to learn and on their willingness to learn more.

Third, study abroad has important benefits for participant's personal development. Fry et al. (2009) reported benefits seen in lifestyle changes. Some of these benefits are that participants' consumption patterns can change by becoming less materialistic and also by gaining a new perspective on their health and diet. Participants also change how they interact with others. They become more patient, tolerant, willing to adapt, and flexible. Participants also gain better communication skills. Participants become more

open-minded, gain a better understanding of themselves, and gain a new philosophy on life. One of the other major findings by Fry et al. (2009) is that participants become more independent and confident.

Some of the most important findings related to teaching in diverse classrooms are changes in participants' intercultural development. The benefits that come from study abroad give participants a new perspective on the world (Fry et al., 2009). In addition to a new perspective on the world, some participants develop a new perspective on social justice issues and an increased desire to be more globally engaged through further international experience. Participants also have a greater desire to learn more about other cultures after a study abroad experience (Fry et al., 2009). These perspectives and desires would make a large impact on how a teacher approaches diverse students within a classroom.

Study abroad participants have positive perceptions of their study abroad experience and the impact it had on their lives. It is also important to note how study abroad participants are viewed compared to how non-study abroad participants are viewed.

Research indicates that a study abroad experience is beneficial in ways that more traditional classroom experiences are not. Phillion, Malewski, Sharma, and Wang (2009) found that study abroad participants were aware of this gap after their study abroad experience. The participants stated that “[the study abroad experience] had a greater impact on their multicultural understandings and global competencies than traditional classroom learning” (p. 336). Clark III et al. (2009) surveyed 70 on campus students and

87 study abroad students taking the same courses. This study found that study abroad participants perceived “themselves to be more proficient, approachable, and open to intercultural communications” (p. 6). Participants also reported being more confident and flexible while interacting with new people and places, greater openness to cultural diversity, and higher acceptance of diversity. Yang (2009) agrees that “having the experience teaching in an overseas country can help improve pre-service teachers’ confidence to cater for learner diversity” (p. 101). Clark III et al. (2009) also stated that because of participants’ “significantly higher acceptance of diversity, they may be more willing to suspend judgment and attempt to understand unfamiliar ways” (p. 177). The most important finding of the study (Clark III et al., 2009) was that study abroad participants possessed “a greater development of intercultural sensitivity” (p.177). The researchers concluded that study abroad participants “may be better prepared to understand life choices and behaviors within another cultural context” (p. 177) than the students that did not participate in the study abroad experience. Nero (2009) agrees stating that “knowledge gained by connecting with students beyond intellectual development gives pre-service teachers added perspective in dealing with students in general and particularly students from other cultures. This is an advantage that they have over pre-service teachers who did not participate in [a] study abroad program” (p.18). Students who do not participate in study abroad might never know what they have missed.

Study abroad experiences are sometimes referred to as cross-cultural immersion experiences. This immersion is what often impacts the participants so positively. Fry et

al. (2009) found that participants' top four impacts of study abroad were due to this cultural immersion. The top four impacts found were increased language fluency, appreciation of other cultures and cultural similarities/differences, broadening of one's perspective and becoming more open-minded, and gaining a greater understanding of other countries. These "cross-cultural immersion experiences have been considered to be an effective way to prepare American pre-service teachers" (Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009, p. 295). However, this cultural immersion doesn't affect all participants the same way, but it does seem to have a huge effect either positively or negatively. Nero (2009) states that "one can argue that coming to terms with these very contradictions and lifestyle differences [between cultures] is the crux of the study abroad learning experience" (p. 178). The differences and contradictions between cultures cause participants to experience "culture shock". This culture shock, if addressed properly, is what makes the experience so meaningful. Hadis (2005) agrees that a "positive resolution of culture shock is to open one's mind to new situations and ideas" (p. 62). When participants have positive attitudes and open their minds to these new situations and ideas they have very positive experiences. Zhao et al. (2009) states that "cross-cultural immersion itself does not promote a better understanding of the 'other' culture and equip pre-service teachers with better skills to work with people of different cultures; rather, it requires that these teachers take an active role and a positive attitude when they are immersed in the culture" (p. 313). If the participants do not do this, they will struggle and "the experience [will] merely reinforce stereotypes or [they will] become so mired in culture shock that they resist any meaningful engagement with the new culture" (Nero,

2009, p. 178) For this reason, it is very important to know the perspectives of students before and during the experience, so that faculty can help guide them towards a positive and life-changing experience.

Study abroad clearly has a large, lasting impact on participants. Their perspectives going into the experience and their perspectives coming out are very important. Most participants experience incredible transformation. Phillion et al. (2009) believes these experiences are important because they “are grounded in multicultural life-experience, [and] we have found that pre-service teachers begin to develop the awareness, sensitivity, and skills they urgently need to bridge the gap” (p. 335-336) with their diverse student populations.

### Barriers to Study Abroad

When we understand students’ perceptions of study abroad, barriers also begin to emerge. Some of the barriers are very real and have to do with a student’s circumstances. Finances, for example, are a major barrier for students when they are looking at a study abroad program. In fact, 23% of students claimed that finances were the largest barrier to study abroad and 60% of students believe that finances are in their top three barriers to study abroad (Doyle et al., 2010). In addition, Salisbury et al. (2008) found that students that receive federal aid “are less likely to plan to study abroad” (p. 133) than those that come from families with higher incomes. Finances are a large barrier to study abroad participants, but if they can get over this barrier, they might agree with other previous participants that claim that this was “the best investment they ever made” (Fry et al., 2009, p.65).



Many students are very close to their families and friends. The decision to leave them, even for a couple months, can be a very difficult choice. Many participants claimed that a barrier toward choosing study abroad is leaving their friends and family (Doyle et al., 2010; Paus & Robinson, 2008). Doyle et al. (2010) found that behind financial concerns, leaving friends and family was the second biggest concern with 17% of participants expressing this concern.

Another barrier against study abroad participation is the need to fill requirements for majors so they can finish their degree first noting that they did not want to delay graduation dates (Doyle et al., 2010). Paus and Robinson (2008) found that 57% of the students that didn't study abroad were held back because they had to fulfill requirements for their majors. Other students reported that they are worried about credits transferring and not wanting to stop current participation in athletics (Paus & Robinson, 2008). Others are hesitant because they do not want to leave a good job or apartment (Doyle et al. 2010).

Some of the other barriers found come from perceptions of challenges that come along with being in another culture. Facing so many unknowns causes some students to be concerned about their safety in another country and others are apprehensive about being in a new environment (Paus & Robinson, 2008). Other students have strong concerns about going to a non-English speaking country (Doyle et al. 2010) and others are concerned about eating different foods, living with host families, and culture shock (Zhao et al., 2009).

Research does mention that one of the reasons study abroad is so transforming, is that it is challenging. Phillion et al. (2009) stated that “experiencing some of the conflicts, contradictions, and challenges [that come from being immersed in another culture] helped pre-service teachers to appreciate the importance of valuing cultures different from their own” (p. 335). Part of the transformation comes from confronting the difficulties that come from being in another culture and navigating through them.

Students are not the only ones that claim that barriers exist. Recently, the Institute of International Education, also known as IIE, (Gutierrez, Auerbach, & Bhandari, 2009) conducted a survey of U.S. study abroad experts and advisors asking them to “indicate the degree to which their institutions experience eleven potential challenges” to increasing study abroad participation. The critical challenges that were listed were:

1. Rising costs of travel;
2. Costs of program administration and lack of institutional funding;
3. Lack of institutional or faculty leadership and commitment to study abroad;
4. Additional staff and space needed for program administration;
5. Lack of student awareness or interest in study abroad;
6. Parental concerns for safety and security abroad (p. 14).

In order to improve study abroad participant numbers, it is important to know which barriers exist so that we can address them.

### Increasing Study Abroad

As noted in previous sections, perceptions and barriers can play a major role in students’ choice to participate in a study abroad experience. This section will discuss

some of the suggested methods to increase the number of study abroad participants. The perceptions and barriers that exist are very real, but they can be overcome. In order for this to be done, it will take a lot of hard work and dedication. As Heisel and Stableski (2009) mention in their research about increasing study abroad, “where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

Schools that make study abroad a priority send large percentages of their students abroad. It was reported in 2010 that “29 institutions [in the U.S.] . . . reported sending more than 70% of their students abroad at some point during their undergraduate careers” (IIE, 2010). Even more impressively, Goucher College (as noted in IIE, 2010) requires all undergraduate students to participate in study abroad. This shows that it is possible to send larger percentages of students abroad when that is a focus of the institution.

One of the most important factors that needs to be addressed for study abroad is finances. As mentioned earlier, finances are an area that is a major challenge for study abroad participation. Gutierrez et al. (2009) found that 83.4% of study abroad experts and advisors believed that more scholarship opportunities would help increase study abroad participation. This was the top factor in increasing study abroad participation for the experts participating in the survey. It is very important for schools to research and provide different financial options for study abroad participants. A scholarship for students is one great way to try to lessen the cost for students and make it available for more students to participate. Lien (2007) concluded in his research on the role of scholarships in study abroad that the best scholarship for study abroad participants is a

fixed scholarship that is not based on ability. Along with addressing the financial aspect of study abroad, Gutierrez et al. (2009) also found that more institutional funding for the office, stronger commitment from faculty and institutional leadership, and integrating programs so that they count towards a student's degree were other top factors that needed to be addressed to increase study abroad participation.

Gutierrez et al. (2009) also found six major themes that came from open ended questions in the survey. The six major themes for increasing study abroad participation were:

1. Increasing budgets and offering additional funding to students to study abroad;
2. Improving marketing and recruitment approaches such as advertising, information sessions, and taking advantage of online social networking tools;
3. Adding staff in order to expand study abroad opportunities, ensure quality, and send more students abroad;
4. Developing new and diverse programs including more short-term programs, and increasing faculty involvement through faculty-led programs;
5. Building international partnerships;
6. Working toward improved integration of study abroad into the curriculum (p. 16).

In addition, Heisel and Stableski (2009) suggest five areas of focus for an institution to increase study abroad participation. The five areas of focus are: conceive and articulate a mission and goal for study abroad; engage faculty as advocates for study abroad; meet the

challenges of financing study abroad; build an effective organization to support study abroad; and identify capacity for expansion of their programs.

Paus and Robinson (2008) discuss the importance of encouragement from both faculty and parents to increase study abroad numbers. The researchers found that 88.2% of study abroad participants were strongly encouraged by faculty and 77.9% were strongly encouraged by their parents. Encouraging study abroad participation is a very important factor for increasing the number of participants. Institutions even need to go as far as discussing study abroad with parents. It is suggested by Paus and Robinson (2008) that “colleges and universities need to make the case for learning abroad for parents who are skeptical” (p. 45). Encouraging study abroad participation cannot be overlooked. It is important for faculty members to simply talk about the option of study abroad and how it can be beneficial to the students. Researchers agree that faculty members might be the key to increasing study abroad participation (O’hara, 2009; Paus & Robinson, 2008). Finding a way to educate faculty on all the benefits of study abroad can make an impact on their ability to encourage students to study abroad. “When faculty are convinced of the value of learning abroad and see how it would fit into their students’ course of study and the kind of opportunities that are available, they are much more likely to encourage their students to pursue such possibilities” (Paus and Robinson, 2008, p. 47).

The literature review examined students’ perceptions of study abroad and some of the benefits. The benefits from these experiences can increase teacher intercultural awareness, skills, and values. This “lived experience of studying abroad provides pre-service teachers the intellectual and critical starting point for multicultural

awareness.” (Phillion et al., 2009) This review also discussed some of the barriers to study abroad and what can be done to overcome them. The next chapter will outline the methods used to investigate the perceived benefits for studying abroad, the barriers to studying abroad, and what incentives can be used to increase study abroad participation for pre-service teachers a Minnesota State University-Mankato.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between the pre-service teachers at Minnesota State University-Mankato and study abroad. This chapter discusses the sample, validity, reliability, and design of the research. The methodology was designed to address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived benefits for studying abroad?
2. What are the barriers that hinder COE students from study abroad?
3. What can be done to increase COE students study abroad participation?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher designed a survey to give to the pre-service teachers at MNSU-Mankato.

#### **Sample**

The sample being used in this research is a convenience sample. This sample was limited to pre-service teachers at Minnesota State University-Mankato. All students registered in the first semester professional education classes in Fall of 2012 were invited to participate in this research. The sample size was thirteen students. Of the thirteen students, four were male and nine were female. Ninety-two percent of the students were in the 19-22 year old range. The group consisted of College of Education students in their first course in their teacher preparation program. This sample of students consisted of one freshman, six sophomores, and six juniors. Ninety-two percent of students were not married and none had children. The ethnic composition of the participants was 85%

White (Non-Hispanic) and 15% Black or African American. Due to the small this sample size, the sample is likely not representative of the larger population of pre-service teachers and is not generalizable beyond Mankato State University-Mankato. The external validity of this research is limited because the sample most likely isn't representative of all pre-service teachers in the state of Minnesota or on the larger US and global scale. Therefore, it is recommended that this research be replicated at other universities to determine if the results of this research are a one-time occurrence or if they are actually more consistent with the larger population of pre-service teachers.

### Sampling Procedures

The researcher was teaching English in South Korea during the time when the research was conducted. As a result, the researcher received assistance from an advisor when informing the participants of the purpose of the research and when administering the consent form and the website for the survey. The researcher's advisor went to first year classes in Minnesota State University-Mankato's teacher preparation program and explained the purpose of this research and collected consent forms. Upon completion of the consent form, the students were given the website to the electronic survey, using the website SurveyMonkey.com. An electronic survey was chosen because of the ease of use for the participants and also because the researcher could distribute and collect the results from the survey quickly and easily from South Korea. The students were given one week to finish the survey. In an attempt to increase the response rate, students were given one reminder through Mankato's D2L website, which is MNSU-Mankato's electronic classroom system. Of the 120 students that were given information on the survey, 74 gave



written consent and 13 surveys were completed. The overall response rate of completed surveys was 10.8%. The response rate of completed surveys from participants that gave consent was 18%. The surveys were completed online and there was no reward or consequence for participation in the survey.

### Research Design

This research project uses a qualitative research design. When designing the survey, the researcher gathered previous research to determine what perceived benefits and barriers were attributed to study abroad. Using existing research, the researcher discussed and designed survey questions with MNSU-Mankato's Director of Field and International Experiences for the College of Education. With her assistance, the researcher outlined possible questions, assumptions, and results in this research. Her expertise in this area assured content validity for the survey questions. With the help of an advisor, the researcher finalized the questions to maximize validity and reliability of the questions.

In the design for this survey, seven demographical questions were used. The seven demographical questions were:

1. What is your sex?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your ethnic background?
4. What is your current year in school?
5. What is your marital status?
6. Do you have any children?

7. How do you currently pay for your tuition?

After the demographical questions, two questions that would permit the grouping of all the participants into four distinct groups. These four groups would provide insights about the students' desires and intentions concerning study abroad. These two yes or no questions were:

1. I want to participate in a study abroad program.
2. I am planning on participating in a study abroad program.

The following chart illustrates how these two questions organized student respondents into four groups.

|                           | Want to Participate | Don't Want to Participate |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Plan to Participate       | Group 1             | Group 4                   |
| Don't Plan to Participate | Group 2             | Group 3                   |

By looking at this chart, we can see the students' desires and intentions concerning study abroad. Group 1 has the desire to study abroad and their intentions are to study abroad. Group 2 has the desire to study abroad but they are not intending to study abroad for some reason. Group 3 has no desire to study abroad and they are not intending to study abroad. Group 4 has no desire to study abroad but their intentions are to study abroad. The researcher assumes that Group 4 is non-typical and very few participants would fall into this category but these students could exist if a parent or other outside influence is requiring them to participate even if they don't want to.

After the students were placed into these four groups, responses to the survey could be analyzed for correlations between groups and the questions. In order to

understand perceptions the students had about study abroad, they answered the following yes or no questions.

1. I think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for a teacher.
2. I think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for understanding other cultures.
3. I think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for understanding myself and my own culture.
4. I think a study abroad experience would teach me important aspects of teaching that I won't learn in the teacher education program.
5. If I participate in a study abroad experience, I will become a better teacher than if I do not participate in a study abroad experience.
6. I think I will learn all I need to learn to be a teacher from the teacher education program.
7. I think it is important for study abroad to be part of teacher education.
8. I think the main reason people study abroad is for fun.

The first objective in examining the data is to identify any correlations between Groups 1-4 and the perceptions of participants. It was hypothesized that Groups 1 and 2 would have a generally positive perception of study abroad and Groups 3 and 4 would generally have a negative perception towards study abroad. If there is a high correlation between Group 2, in which the participants want to study abroad but are not planning on participating, and a "YES" to perception question 1, which means that the participants think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for a teacher, then we know that they

have the desire to go, they think it would be beneficial, but they are not planning on going. In this situation, it seems that something is holding them back from participating, potentially some type of barrier.

The next section of the survey was designed to discover possible barriers that exist for the participants. The survey used eight questions that address possible barriers for the participants. Questions 1-7 are yes or no questions that were designed to address the potential barriers that were suggested in the literature review that students might have. The last question, number 8, was designed to discover any other barriers that could exist that were not discussed in the survey questions.

1. Finances would not be a factor in my decision to participate in an international study abroad experience.
2. I feel well informed on MNSU-Mankato's international study abroad opportunities.
3. I have been interested in study abroad since I was in high school.
4. I will not participate in an international study abroad experience if it delays my graduation date.
5. Being close to my family or friends is more important to me than participating study abroad.
6. My family would support my decision to study abroad.
7. My friends would support my decision to study abroad.
8. Please list any reasons why you won't participate in a study abroad program.

The next set of questions was designed to determine if and how to address the barriers between pre-service teachers at MNSU-Mankato and study abroad experiences. Questions 1-5 are yes or no questions. Questions 6-8 were designed to collect ideas from the participants to increase study abroad participation that might not have been included in the questions in the survey. The questions that will address ways to overcome barriers were:

1. I would consider study abroad if I received a grant.
2. I would like to receive more information on study abroad.
3. I would like the opportunity to student teach locally as well as participate in a study abroad experience.
4. I would study abroad if it was built into the teacher education program.
5. I would study abroad if I could go with someone I know.
6. My top 3 choices of countries for a study abroad program would be:
7. Please list any incentives or changes that can be made that would encourage you to participate in a study abroad program.
8. What is the best way for you to receive more information on MNSU-Mankato's study abroad program?

Analysis and synthesis of responses from these questions permitted identification of the most common ways to overcome barriers that pre-service teachers have in accessing study abroad.

The survey was designed to gain more understanding of pre-service teachers perceptions about assets and barriers to study abroad, and also seek information from

participants about ways to overcome some of the barriers that exist. The analysis of student responses to this survey will be reported in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data collected in an online survey designed for pre-service teachers at Minnesota State University-Mankato to assess their desires and intentions for study abroad as well as potential barriers that exist toward study abroad.

This chapter will report the participants' demographics, perceptions, desires and intentions regarding study abroad, barriers that exists towards study abroad, and suggestions for ways to increase study abroad participation. The results will help address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived benefits for studying abroad?
2. What are the barriers that hinder COE students from study abroad?
3. What can be done to increase COE students study abroad participation?

#### Demographics

This section discusses the results related to the demographics of the participants in the survey. The results for some of the questions from the survey are displayed as charts to add clarity.

##### Gender

As shown in Table 1, the total of 13 participants consisted of four males and nine females.

| Table 1<br><i>Gender of Participants</i> |    |      |
|--|----|------|
|  | #  | %    |
| Male                                     | 4  | 31%  |
| Female                                   | 9  | 69%  |
| Total                                    | 13 | 100% |

### Ethnic Background of Participants

The self-identified ethnicities of the participants can be seen in Table 2. Eleven of the thirteen participants (85%) identified themselves as White (Non-Hispanic). The remaining two participants identified themselves as Black or African American.

| Table 2<br><i>Ethnic Background of Participants</i> |    |      |
|---|----|------|
|   | #  | %    |
| White (Non-Hispanic)                                | 11 | 85%  |
| Black or African American                           | 2  | 15%  |
| Total   | 13 | 100% |

### Academic Year of Participants

The target participants for this study were students in their first year of their teacher preparation courses. In this study, most of these participants were in their sophomore or junior year at MNSU-Mankato. The results showing the academic year of the participants at the time of the survey can be seen in Table 3.



| Table 3<br><i>Academic Year of Participants</i> |    |      |
|---|----|------|
|   | #  | %    |
| Freshman  | 1  | 8%   |
| Sophomore                                       | 6  | 46%  |
| Junior  | 6  | 46%  |
| Total   | 13 | 100% |

#### Age of Participants

The ages of the participants did not vary greatly. Most of the participants were traditional college aged students between the ages of 18 and 22. However, there was one student that did not fall into the traditional college aged group. The results for the ages of the students can be seen in Table 4.

| Table 4<br><i>Age of Participants</i> |    |      |
|---------------------------------------|----|------|
| Age                                   | #  | %    |
| 18                                    | 1  | 8%   |
| 19                                    | 4  | 31%  |
| 20                                    | 5  | 38%  |
| 21                                    | 1  | 8%   |
| 22                                    | 1  | 8%   |
| 26                                    | 1  | 8%   |
| Total                                 | 13 | 100% |

### Marital Status and Participants with Children

Twelve of the thirteen participants (92%) of the participants in this survey were not married. One of the participants was married during this survey. None of the participants in this survey had children.

### Method of Payment for Tuition

The students were asked how they paid for their tuition. Multiple answers were allowed in the responses. The complete method of payment for tuition was different for each participant. The most frequent response by the participants (92%) was that they paid part of their tuition using loans or financial aid. The next two most frequent answers by the participants for method of payment for tuition were scholarships and working a job. Complete results of how the participants pay for their tuition can be seen in Table 5.

|                     | #  | % of students |
|---------------------|----|---------------|
| Loans/Financial Aid | 12 | 92%           |
| Scholarships        | 6  | 46%           |
| Working a Job       | 6  | 46%           |
| Grants              | 5  | 38%           |
| Parents             | 4  | 31%           |
| Family Member       | 1  | 8%            |
| Total Students      | 13 | 100%          |

## Desire and Intent to Study Abroad

This section of the results discusses the results of the questions relating to the participants desire to study abroad and their intention of participating in study abroad. The pre-service teachers' desires and intentions concerning study abroad were a focal point in the analysis of the results of this survey. The researcher hypothesized that the pre-service teachers either had the desire to study abroad or they did not. Of the thirteen participants, seven participants wanted to study abroad and six participants did not want to study abroad. The researcher also hypothesized that the pre-service teachers were either planning on studying abroad or they were not. Of the same thirteen participants, five were planning on studying abroad and eight were not planning on studying abroad. Table 6 shows the results of these questions.

| Table 6   |   |              |              |
|---|---|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Participants Responses to Desire and Intent Towards Study Abroad</i> |   |              |              |
|   |   | Yes          | No           |
| Desire  | I want to participate in a study abroad program.          | n=7<br>(54%) | n=6<br>(46%) |
| Intent  | I am planning on participating in a study abroad program. | n=5<br>(38%) | n=8<br>(62%) |

The researcher used the results of these two questions to form four different groups based on how the participants responded to see the correlation between the students' desire and their intentions and also to see if there were any other correlations in other data. The way these groups were determined can be seen in Table 7.

| Table 7<br><i>Formation of Groups and Number of Participants per Group</i> |                     |                           |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|
|  | Want to Participate | Don't Want to Participate |
| Plan to Participate  | Group 1<br>n=5      | Group 4<br>n=0            |
| Don't Plan to Participate  | Group 2<br>n=2      | Group 3<br>n=6            |

There were a total of 13 participants in these four groups. No participants were excluded from analysis because they all responded to these two questions. These two questions were the starting point for analysis. The results from these two questions revealed that five participants were in Group 1, two participants were in Group 2, six participants were in Group 3, and no participants were in Group 4. Since there were no participants in Group 4, all of the following charts exclude Group 4.

### Perceptions

#### Participants Think Study Abroad is Beneficial in Some Ways

Interestingly, all of the participants, regardless of group, had the perception that study abroad was beneficial for a teacher. Along with that perception, they all had the perception that study abroad would be beneficial for understanding other cultures, themselves, and their own cultures. Also, 100% of all the participants had the perception that study abroad would teach them important aspects of teaching that are not taught in the teacher education program. These results can be seen in Table 8.

| Table 8  |      |    |
|--|------|----|
| <i>Participants Think Study Abroad is Beneficial in Some Ways</i>  |      |    |
| Question   | Yes  | No |
| Do you think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for a teacher?  | 100% | 0% |
| Do you think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for understanding other cultures?   | 100% | 0% |
| Do you think a study abroad experience would be beneficial for understanding yourself and your own culture?                            | 100% | 0% |
| Do you think a study abroad experience would teach important aspects of teaching that are not taught in the teacher education program? | 100% | 0% |

### Does Study Abroad Make Better Teachers?

One of the perceptions asked about in the survey was “Do you think participating in a study abroad experience will make someone a better teacher than if they did not participate in a study abroad experience?” Of the thirteen participants, five participants (38%) answered yes to the question. An interesting result is that Group 2 participants, who want to participate in study abroad but do not plan to do so, do not think that this would make someone a better teacher. The results of this question can be seen in Table 9.

| Table 9  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Does Study Abroad Makes a Someone a Better Teacher?</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 3   | 2  |
| Group 2  | 0   | 2  |
| Group 3  | 2   | 4  |
| Total  | 5   | 8  |

Do Participants Think They Will Learn Everything Needed to Start Your Career From the Teacher Education Program?

The participants were split almost evenly when asked if they would learn everything needed to start their career in teacher education at MNSU-Mankato. Of the thirteen participants, six of them had the perception that they would learn everything they needed to be a teacher from the standard teacher education program and seven did not have this perception. This, however, was not evenly distributed between the groups. Groups 1 and 2 participants, who wanted to participate in study abroad, had the perception that they would not learn everything they needed from the teacher education program. Six out of the seven participants (86%) in Groups 1 and 2 had the perception that there is more to learn than the teacher education program offers, while five out of six participants (83%) in Group 3, who did not want to study abroad, had the perception that they would learn everything they needed from the program. The results from this question can be seen in Table 10.

| Table 10   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Do Participants Think They Will Learn Everything Needed to Start a Career from the Teacher Education Program?</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 1   | 4  |
| Group 2  | 0   | 2  |
| Group 3  | 5   | 1  |
| Total  | 6   | 7  |

### Do Participants Think Study Abroad is Important to Teacher Education?

Five out of the thirteen participants had the perception that a study abroad program was an important part of teacher education. All five of these participants were in Group 1, the group that wants to study abroad and is planning to participate in studying abroad. Groups 2 and 3 participants, who were not planning to participate in study abroad, made up all eight participants that did not think study abroad was an important part of teacher education. The results can be seen in Table 11.

|         | Yes | No |
|---------|-----|----|
| Group 1 | 5   | 0  |
| Group 2 | 0   | 2  |
| Group 3 | 0   | 6  |
| Total   | 5   | 8  |

### Do Most Participants Think the Main Reason For Study Abroad is Fun?

Most of the participants had the perception that the main reason students study abroad is for fun. Of the thirteen participants, nine (69%) believed this to be true. It does stand out that Group 3 participants, who do not want to study abroad and are not planning to study abroad overwhelmingly see study abroad as something that is done just for fun. The results of this question can be seen in Table 12.

| Table 12   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Do Most Participants Think the Main Reason For Study Abroad is Fun?</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 3   | 2  |
| Group 2  | 1   | 1  |
| Group 3  | 5   | 1  |
| Total  | 9   | 4  |

### Barriers

This section discusses the results to the questions in the survey related to barriers associated with study abroad participation.

#### Money Is a Major Factor in the Decision to Participate in Study Abroad

Eleven of twelve participants (92%) that answered this question claimed that finances would be a major factor in their decision to participate in study abroad. There was also one participant that skipped this question. The results for this question can be seen in Table 13.

| Table 13  |    |      |
|---|----|------|
| <i>Is Money a Major Factor in the Decision to Study Abroad?</i> |    |      |
|   | #  | %    |
| Yes   | 11 | 85%  |
| No  | 1  | 8%   |
| Skipped   | 1  | 8%   |
| Total   | 13 | 100% |



Do Participants Feel Well Informed About MNSU-Mankato’s Study Abroad Opportunities?

Only 23% of the participants in the survey felt that they were well informed about MNSU-Mankato’s study abroad opportunities. This means that a large majority of the participants (77%) felt that they were not well informed about the study abroad opportunities at MNSU-Mankato. Interestingly, none of the students that felt well informed were part of Group 1, the group that wanted to study abroad and was planning on studying abroad. The results of this question can be seen in Table 14.

| Table 14<br><i>Do Participants Feel Well Informed About MNSU-Mankato’s Study Abroad Opportunities?</i> |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 0   | 5  |
| Group 2  | 1   | 1  |
| Group 3  | 2   | 4  |
| Total  | 3   | 10 |

Have Participants Been Interested in Study Abroad Since High School?

Seven of the thirteen participants claimed that they have been interested in study abroad since high school with Group 1 (want to study abroad and plan to) largely interested since high school and Group 3 (don’t want to study abroad and don’t plan to) largely uninterested since high school. The results for this question can be seen in Table 15.

| Table 15  |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| <i>Have Participants Been Interested in Study Abroad Since High School?</i> |     |    |
|   | Yes | No |
| Group 1   | 4   | 1  |
| Group 2   | 2   | 0  |
| Group 3   | 1   | 5  |
| Total   | 7   | 6  |

Four of the seven participants claimed that they had been interested in study abroad since high school and are planning on studying abroad which means that three of the seven are not planning on participating. Looking into the other responses of the three students that have been interested in study abroad since high school but are not planning on participating in study abroad shows some interesting results. All of them believe that they will not learn all they need to learn to start their career as a teacher from the teacher education program. They all also believe that it is not important for study abroad to be part of the teacher education program. They all agreed that finances would be a major factor in their decision to study abroad and all said they would consider participating in study abroad if they received a grant. Also, two of the three participants felt well informed on MNSU-Mankato's study abroad opportunities while all three said they did not want anymore information regarding study abroad.

#### Will Participants Study Abroad if it Delays Graduation?

Nine of the thirteen participants (69%) claimed that they would not participate in a study abroad experience if it delayed their graduation. Group 3 participants (don't want

to study abroad and don't plan to) were most concerned about any delay in graduation of the three groups. The results broken down by groups can be seen in Table 16.

| Table 16   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Will Participants Study Abroad if it Delays Graduation?</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 3   | 2  |
| Group 2  | 0   | 2  |
| Group 3  | 1   | 5  |
| Total  | 4   | 9  |

#### Participants Have Support From Family and Friends

All of the participants in this survey claimed that their families would support their decision to study abroad. Twelve of the thirteen participants (92%) also claimed that their friends would support their decision to study abroad. At the same time, three of the thirteen (23%) claimed that being apart from their family and friends might deter them from participating in a study abroad program.

#### Increasing Study Abroad Participation

This section discusses the results of the participants' responses about ways to improve study abroad participation.

#### Participants Would Consider Study Abroad if They Received a Grant

This study found that all of the participants, regardless of group, would consider participating in study abroad if they received a grant. The results can be seen in Table 17.

| Table 17   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Participants Would Consider Study Abroad if They Received a Grant</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 5   | 0  |
| Group 2  | 2   | 0  |
| Group 3  | 6   | 0  |
| Total  | 13  | 0  |

Participants Would Like an Opportunity to Student Teach Locally and Participate in Study Abroad

When the participants were asked if they would like the opportunity to do their student teaching locally and be a part of study abroad, twelve of the thirteen participants (92%) said yes. The results by group can be seen in Table 18.

| Table 18   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Participants Would Like an Opportunity to Student Teach Locally and Participate in Study Abroad</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 5   | 0  |
| Group 2  | 1   | 1  |
| Group 3  | 6   | 0  |
| Total  | 12  | 1  |

### Participants Would Like Study Abroad to Be Built into the Teacher Education Program

Ten of the thirteen participants (77%) said they would like if study abroad was built into the teacher education program. The results can be seen in Table 19.

| Table 19<br><i>Participants Would Like Study Abroad to Be Built into the Teacher Education Program</i> |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 5   | 0  |
| Group 2  | 0   | 2  |
| Group 3  | 5   | 1  |
| Total  | 10  | 3  |

### Participants Would Be More Likely to Study Abroad With Someone They Knew

Ten of the thirteen participants (77%) claimed they would be more likely to study abroad if they could go with someone they knew. The results by group can be seen in Table 20.

| Table 20<br><i>Participants Would Be More Likely to Study Abroad With Someone They Knew</i> |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
|   | Yes | No |
| Group 1   | 4   | 1  |
| Group 2   | 1   | 1  |
| Group 3   | 5   | 1  |
| Total   | 10  | 3  |

### Best Ways for Participants To Receive Information on Study Abroad

Participants were allowed to choose multiple answers to the question that asked what the best way to receive information about study abroad was. Eleven of the twelve students (92%) that responded to this question claimed that email was the best way for them to receive information about study abroad. The next most common response for a way to receive information was from staff in person with six respondents (50%). The complete results can be seen in Table 21.

|             | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 | Total |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Email       | 5       | 1       | 5       | 11    |
| From Staff  | 3       | 0       | 3       | 6     |
| COE Website | 1       | 0       | 3       | 4     |
| Brochures   | 1       | 0       | 3       | 4     |
| Facebook    | 0       | 0       | 1       | 1     |
| Skipped     | 0       | 1       | 0       | 1     |
| Phone/Text  | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0     |

### Do Participants Want More Information on Study Abroad

When asked if they wanted more information on study abroad, only seven of the thirteen participants said yes. All five of the people in Group 1--the group that wants to study abroad and is planning on studying abroad--were included in the seven wanting

more information on study abroad. All the results by for this question can be seen by each group in Table 22.

| Table 22   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <i>Do Participants Want More Information on Study Abroad</i> |     |    |
|  | Yes | No |
| Group 1  | 5   | 0  |
| Group 2  | 0   | 2  |
| Group 3  | 2   | 4  |
| Total  | 7   | 6  |

#### Suggested Incentives or Changes that Can be Made to Encourage Study Abroad

The participants were asked what incentives or changes could be made to encourage them to participate in the study abroad program. Responses were given by eight of the thirteen participants. Multiple responses were allowed in an open response format. All of the responses fell into two categories; finances and information. The most frequent responses were in reference to money. The participants either wanted study abroad to be less expensive, they suggested offering a grant or scholarship, or they wanted to know how to fundraise for study abroad. The second most common responses were in reference to information. The participants wanted to receive more information about the program and options, they wanted to know that their classes could transfer, or they wanted to be reassured that study abroad is a good experience. All of the responses can be seen in Table 23.

| Table 23<br><i>Suggested Incentives or Changes that Can be Made to Encourage Study Abroad</i> |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
|   | # | %   |
| Receive a Grant/Scholarship or Make Study Abroad Less Expensive                               | 5 | 63% |
| Receive More Information About Study Abroad and All the Options                               | 3 | 38% |
| Fundraising   | 1 | 13% |
| Reassurance That Study Abroad Classes Will Transfer MNSU-Mankato                              | 1 | 13% |
| Reassurance That Study Abroad is a Good Experience  | 1 | 13% |

#### Reasons That They Would Not Study Abroad

The participants were given the ability to give an open response about why they would not participate in study abroad. Twelve participants responded to this question. Nine of the twelve (75%) responded that the cost of study abroad is a reason they would not study abroad. There were no patterns that formed based on groups. All of the results can be seen in Table 24.



| Table 24                                    |         |         |         |       |     |
|---|---------|---------|---------|-------|-----|
| <i>Reason They Would Not Study Abroad</i>   |         |         |         |       |     |
|   | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 | Total | %   |
| Cost of study abroad or money               | 4       | 1       | 4       | 9     | 75% |
| Delaying graduation                         | 2       | -       | 1       | 3     | 25% |
| Can't take classes that count towards major | 1       | -       | 1       | 2     | 17% |
| Have to go where I don't speak the language | 1       | -       | -       | 1     | 8%  |
| Not an ideal country/area                   | 1       | -       | -       | 1     | 8%  |
| Homesickness                                | -       | -       | 1       | 1     | 8%  |
| Never been interested in study abroad       | -       | -       | 1       | 1     | 8%  |

#### Where Do Participants Want to Study Abroad

Participants were given the option to list 3 places that they wanted to study abroad. Twelve of the thirteen participants responded to this question. The most frequent responses were England, France, and Australia. All of their responses can be seen in Table 25.

| Table 25<br><i>Where Do Participants Want To Study Abroad</i> |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
|   | # | %   |
| England   | 8 | 67% |
| France  | 5 | 42% |
| Australia   | 4 | 33% |
| Italy   | 3 | 25% |
| Ireland   | 3 | 25% |
| Costa Rica  | 2 | 17% |
| Scotland  | 1 | 8%  |
| Africa  | 1 | 8%  |
| New Zealand   | 1 | 8%  |
| Japan   | 1 | 8%  |
| Texas, USA  | 1 | 8%  |
| Spain   | 1 | 8%  |
| Finland   | 1 | 8%  |
| Greece  | 1 | 8%  |
| Portugal  | 1 | 8%  |
| Switzerland   | 1 | 8%  |
| Sweden  | 1 | 8%  |

The results from this study will be summarized and conclusions will be drawn in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER 5

The goal of this research project was to understand the perceived benefits and barriers that exist for study abroad for pre-service teachers at MNSU-Mankato. The research questions studied were:

1. What are the perceived benefits for studying abroad?
2. What are the barriers that hinder COE students from study abroad?
3. What can be done to increase COE students study abroad participation?

A literature review was conducted that led to the development of a survey to inform this research. The survey was conducted with 120 students in their first teacher preparation course at MNSU-Mankato. Information was collected to answer the research questions along with participants' thoughts about ways to increase participation in study abroad. This chapter summarizes the findings from the literature review, discusses the findings from the survey, suggests implications for the results, and identifies the limitations of this study.

### Findings

The literature review in this study found that many teachers are not entering school prepared to address the challenges of diversity. It also found that the effects of study abroad are beneficial in many ways and can be a way to help pre-service teachers understand more about themselves, gain cultural awareness, and learn lessons that will help them become better teachers. The literature review revealed that research on participants' perceptions going into study abroad is limited but that there is extensive

research on the impact of study abroad and it is generally very positive. The literature review also found that there are many barriers to participation in study abroad and that finances were a large barrier for students. These barriers can and need to be address to increase study abroad participation. Previous research found that it was important to address financial concerns with students and that having a faculty and staff that encouraged study abroad would increase study abroad participation.

The participants in this research had positive perceptions towards the benefits of study abroad. All the participants believed that study abroad was beneficial for understanding other cultures, themselves, and their own culture. They all also believed that study abroad was beneficial for teachers and that it would teach important aspects of teaching that are not taught in the teacher education program. But the findings also revealed that 62% of them perceived that these benefits don't translate into them being better teachers. Findings also revealed that all of the participants in Groups 2 and 3, the groups not planning on participating in study abroad, thought study abroad was not an important part of teacher education. Overall, nine of the thirteen students perceived that the main reason for study abroad was for a fun experience.

The participants also confirmed a common finding that money is a major barrier for the students when it comes to participating in study abroad. However, the research also found that all of the participants would consider participating in study abroad if they received grant money.

This research also revealed that the participants do not feel well informed about study abroad at MNSU-Mankato. Even participants in Group 1, the students that were

planning on studying abroad, felt that they were not well informed and all of them wanted more information.

The research revealed that a majority of the participants (69%) are not interested in delaying their graduation date. The research also showed that most of the participants would like to have study abroad built into the teacher education program. It also revealed that 92% of the participants would like it if they could student teach locally and participate in study abroad.

### Implications

Participants overall have positive perceptions of study abroad. However, the findings suggest that they are uninformed or misinformed about some of the benefits that study abroad has for teachers. If the MNSU-Mankato teacher education program can take the already positive perception about study abroad and correctly inform the students of the benefits to them and their career, an opportunity to increase the number of participants in study abroad could be provided.

All students claimed they would consider participating in study abroad if grants were available. If MNSU-Mankato can make financial grants available and known to all pre-service teachers, MNSU-Mankato could increase the number of people participating in study abroad.

Graduating on time is important to students. Even though participants see study abroad as beneficial in certain areas, graduating on time seems to be more beneficial to them. Most of the participants in this study claimed that they would like it if study abroad was built into the program. This finding suggests that MNSU-Mankato should provide a

path, within the normal graduation timeline, for pre-service teachers to take part in study abroad so that they can experience the benefits that study abroad has to offer. If MNSU-Mankato can do that, they could potentially increase the number of participants in study abroad.

### Conclusion

The findings of this research are very encouraging. The participants understand that study abroad has some great benefits. If they had the chance to hear more about information about the benefits from past participants that are now teaching, they could easily come to realize how study abroad can be an incredible experience that can benefit them once they graduate and become teachers. The barriers of information, finances, and graduating on time are barriers the participants in this research want to see overcome. If MNSU-Mankato can make adjustments to how they are informing the students, make more money available for study abroad, and include options for a study abroad path in the education program, the number of participants may increase. If MNSU-Mankato believes that study abroad is important and beneficial for pre-service teachers, this opportunity could be extended to all students with the right adjustments and support from faculty. Study abroad is a life changing experience. It is a great tool for making teachers better. Study abroad for pre-service teachers can be the norm.

### Limitations

This research is limited by the number of participants. The response rate for this study was very low and can be improved in the future. One recommendation would be to offer a reward such as extra credit points to the students for completing the survey. This

would require that participation in the survey was not anonymous. By improving the response rate, a researcher will get a much more accurate picture of the larger population of pre-service teachers.

This research is also limited by selecting only students at MNSU-Mankato. Therefore, it isn't generalizable to pre-service teachers elsewhere. Another recommendation would be to complete this research at more colleges in Minnesota and then possibly on a national level to really begin to understand the relationship between pre-service teachers and study abroad.

Also, after beginning the research, more questions began to arise. Questions that arose are:

1. What experiences do pre-service teachers think will make them better teachers?
2. What aspects of teaching do pre-service teachers think they will not learn in the education program?
3. What do pre-service teachers think are important parts of teacher education program?

The researcher also became interested in understanding the faculty's perspective towards study abroad and if they promoted it or if it wasn't an important aspect of teacher education to them. These questions were not explored in this study, but should be part of any future studies.

## Summary

This study found that pre-service teachers have a generally positive perception of study abroad. Participants believed that study abroad was beneficial, but they didn't think that it would make them better teachers and they didn't think it was an important part of teacher education. They are still uninformed about the benefits of study abroad and how it can teach them to be better teachers, but they seem open to participating if barriers are removed. It is important for MNSU-Mankato to remove these barriers if they want to transform the education of pre-service teachers into one that involves life and career changing perspectives that come from a study abroad experience. All of the participants in this study said they would consider participating in study abroad if money was not a barrier and most of the participants said they would like if study abroad was built into the teacher education program. MNSU-Mankato needs to find ways to minimize and possibly remove the financial barriers and also make a path that allows students to study abroad and finish their degree without delaying graduation.



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