“learning abroad” at MSU

Background

Two Groups

36747 Undergraduates at MSU

2380 Study Abroad students (6%, Open Doors, 2011-12)

3341 International undergraduate students (9%, 2011)

Generally seen as two separate populations
Both groups have “learning abroad” experiences.

But, what assumptions are we making about their common experience of learning abroad?

We need to take a closer look at what is similar and different.
Research Question
What gains and emotions characterize students’ learning abroad experiences?

Data
Essays from Study Abroad & International students

Analysis
Coding, Inter-rater checking
### Gains

#### Categories & sub-categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gains</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td>growth (insight, confidence), step out of comfort zone, fitting in and belonging, perspective on struggle, lifestyle (pace of living, enjoying company, material needs, YOLO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical</strong></td>
<td>appreciation for what we have, realizing poverty, injustice, inequity, privilege and wealth, desire to make a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic &amp; Career</strong></td>
<td>inspiration/change, insight into subject, insight into academic culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercultural</strong></td>
<td>communication and behavior, adapting, knowledge of culture, seeing similarity, changing preconceptions about host culture, changing preconceptions about home culture, respecting differences, interconnectedness, encountering ignorance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>Language learning, Travel, Practical</td>
</tr>
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</table>
similar & different?

Results

What do expect are the most frequently mentioned gains for each group?
gains: all students
Personal (35), Intercultural (22), perspective on struggle (12), Academic & Career (12), Critical (6)
gains: which group?

Personal(15), Intercultural(14), perspective on struggle(9), academic culture(5), stepping out of comfort zone (3), communication and behavior(3)
gains: which group?
Personal (20), Intercultural (8), Critical (6), Academic & Career (6), lifestyle: material needs (5)
gains: international students
Personal(15), Intercultural(14), perspective on struggle(9), academic culture(5), stepping out of comfort zone (3), communication and behavior(3)
gains: study abroad students
Personal (20), Intercultural (8), Critical (6), Academic & Career (6), lifestyle: material needs (5)
similar & different?

Personal Gains

Personal gains near top for both

...but of much greater relative significance for study abroad students
similar & different?

Intercultural Gains

Intercultural gains near top for both

...but of greater relative significance for international students.
Intercultural gains were frequently reported by both groups...but the nature of the gain was different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Abroad (8)</th>
<th>International (14)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; behavior (3)</td>
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Personal gains were frequently reported by both groups

...but the nature of the personal gain was different.

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<th>Study Abroad (20)</th>
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<td>Lifestyle: material needs (5)</td>
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<td>Lifestyle: pace of living (4)</td>
<td>Step out of comfort zone (3)</td>
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similar & different?
Cultural Distance

Near
UK, New Zealand, Ireland, Italy, Germany, France, Greece

Far
China, India, Malaysia, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Turkey, Brazil, Ecuador, Dominican Republic

How might the “cultural distance” between students’ home and host country make a difference? Guess?
gains: near or far culture?

Personal (13), perspective on struggle (4), Academic & Career (4), intercultural (3)
gains: near or far culture?

Personal (22), Intercultural (19), perspective on struggle (8), academic & career (5), Critical (5), communication & behavior (5)
gains: in a “near” culture
Personal (13), perspective on struggle (4), Academic & Career (4), intercultural (3)
gains: in a “distant” culture
Personal (22), Intercultural (19), perspective on struggle (8), academic & career (5), Critical (5), communication & behavior (5)
gains
Cultural Distance

Critical - most for Far Cultural Distance and Study Abroad students, little elsewhere

Intercultural – more often for Far Cultural Distance

Personal growth – frequently report for Near and Far Cultural Distances

Perspective on struggle – similar for Near and Far Cultural Distance
# emotions

## Categories & sub-categories

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<td>optimistic, gratitude (for the experience, for the support, for what they have), appreciation of campus beauty, acceptance, humor, content, appreciating daily life, acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>eager, determined, curiosity, surprise, amazed, enthusiasm, amusement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>anxious, fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>frustration, annoyed, irritated, indignation, judgment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>disappointed, homesick, helplessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tender</td>
<td>humility, admiration</td>
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What do you expect are the most frequently mentioned emotions for each group?
emotions: all students
Happy (37), Excited (22), Scared (15), anxious (14), optimistic (10)
emotions: which students?
Happy (20), Scared (13), anxious (13), Excited (13), optimistic (6), determined (6)
emotions: which students?
Happy (17), Excited (9), gratitude for the experience (9), optimistic (4), Tender (4), Angry (4)
emotions: international students
Happy (20), Scared (13), anxious (13), Excited (13), optimistic (6),
determined (6)
emotions: study abroad students
Happy (17), Excited (9), gratitude for the experience (9), optimistic (4), Tender (4), Angry (4)
International Students
Most common emotions were Happy, Scared, and Excited.

Study Abroad Students
Most common emotions were Happy and Excited
Sad. Reported mostly by International Students
emotions: cultural distance - near

Happy (12), Excited (7), optimistic (5), Scared (4), anxious (4).

n = 10
emotions: cultural distance - far

Happy (25), Excited (15), Scared (11), anxious (10), gratitude for the experience (6), optimistic (5), Sad (5), Angry (5), determined (5)

N = 29
emotions

Cultural Distance

Scared – more frequent with Far CD

Sad – only reported with Far CD, and most mostly for International Students
implications
So What?

Suppose

...your institution is trying to promote dialogue between Chinese international students and China study abroad students.
Keep in mind, similar & different intercultural gains

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implications

Keep in mind, similar & different personal gains

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keep in mind...
Both groups are Happy and Excited. But, international students are also often Scared and Sad.
Dialogue about “learning abroad” between Study Abroad and International students is important.

We should note similarities and differences in their experiences.

These similarities & differences can be the basis for productive, interesting dialogue.
emotions: male or female?

Happy (19), Excited (10), Scared (8), anxious (6), gratitude for the experience (6), determined (5)
emotions: male or female?

Happy (18), Excited (12), Scared (7), anxious (7), optimistic (4), humor (4)
emotions: female
Happy (19), Excited (10), Scared (8), anxious (6), gratitude for the experience (6), determined (5)
emotions: male
Happy (18), Excited (12), Scared (7), anxious (7), optimistic (4), humor (4)
Happy & Excited top for both, by a large margin

Not much difference in the emotions or the relative order

Excited expressed by both, but "determined" was a larger part of that for women.
implications
An Example

Developing Global Competence?

Both groups saw similarities between themselves and people from the host culture (e.g., “we are all the same underneath”)

When the study abroad student expresses this, we may see it as a undesirable stage in the development of global competency (Bennett; Hammer)

When the international student expresses this, they are often saying this in the context of wanting to belong to the campus community, of not feeling like such an outsider.
Common Ground - A central idea in communication theory (Clark & Brennan, 1991)

To what degree does learning abroad constitute common ground?

On-campus experiences should also be considered as potential common ground.

The purpose of the communication is probably another important factor.
implications
Finding Common Experiences

6-9% of students share learning abroad experiences
100% of students share learning on campus experiences