

INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN STUDY ABROAD:
CURRENT PRACTICES AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Study Abroad: Current Practices and Student Perspectives

While there has been an increase in the numbers of students studying abroad each year, the participation of students with disabilities remains low. As internationalization of higher education takes new steps, bringing along with it the myriad benefits of intercultural exchange, study abroad becomes an important and often required component of educational experience. This study explored the current practices and experiences of the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad programs. The interviews with 10 study abroad professionals, 5 students with disabilities, and 1 faculty reveal discrepancies in the perceptions of the current practices. In light of the findings of this research, I argue that the study abroad experience promotes higher levels of identity development for students with disabilities. I also propose recommendations to ensure the positive experience for both study abroad professionals and students with disabilities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to assess, through phone interviews with study abroad professionals and students with disabilities, current practices, challenges, needs, motivations, and considerations of students with disabilities' participation in study abroad. My main research question was: "What are current practices and experiences of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities in study abroad?" The results of this study suggest recommendations for increasing the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad and for improving future experiences of study abroad professionals in their work with students with disabilities.

While recent research has focused on underrepresentation in study abroad, little research on study abroad and students with disabilities has been published. The research that has been conducted in this area has mainly focused on students with disabilities' perceptions regarding study abroad (Matthews, Hameister, & Hosley, 1998), providing recommendations and noting implications for education abroad staff (Hameister, Matthews, Hosley, & Groff, 1999), as well as underscoring the impact of study abroad on students with disabilities (Shames & Alden, 2005). However, the main sources of information on study abroad and students with disabilities come from the publications written by the Mobility International USA (MIUSA), a nonprofit organization with a mission to "empower people with disabilities to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development" (About Mobility International USA).

While MIUSA's publications as well as publications by the individuals active in the field provide important recommendations and guidelines for study abroad professionals on working with students with disabilities, this study aims to contribute to the field by exploring the actual practices and experiences of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities.

Personal Statement

I chose to use a qualitative inquiry strategy to answer the above question. When conducting a qualitative research, it is important for researchers to reflect on their own standpoints and examine the influence of these standpoints on the research. By reflecting on my motivations, my understanding and my own personal viewpoint on this issue, I aim to understand and learn what I bring to my research and how I influence it.

My interest in this study comes from a range of personal and professional experiences. In 2006 I came to the United States as an undergraduate exchange student. I had never been out of my country before and had never lived outside of my home in Uzbekistan. My year-long study abroad experience in the United States was transformational. Not only did I learn about a different lifestyle, educational system, and gained knowledge of new culture, but I also learned so much about myself and my culture. I became a more open-minded person, gained clarity on my future career goals, and became a more mature and independent individual. This experience inspired me to encourage other students to study abroad as the benefits of the international education are numerous.

When I came to the U.S., I also noticed a lot more people with disabilities. Just like many students from the post-Soviet countries who come to the United States, I initially thought that in the U.S. there are so many more people with disabilities. Of course, then I realized that it was not that there were more people with disabilities in the United States than in the post-Soviet countries, but it was that people with disabilities in the United States participated as active citizens in their communities and they were accepted by the society as active citizens. This realization sparked my interest in learning how I can play a role in changing these views of disability in many parts of the world. In my first year of my Master's program I learned about Mobility International USA. After interning with MIUSA, I realized that by doing this research I will combine my passion for international education and my interest in improving the lives of people with disabilities around the world.

I have been working as a study abroad graduate assistant at the University of Oregon (UO) for almost two years. I advise UO students about internships abroad and study abroad programs in Australia and New Zealand. It is my goal to stay in the field of international education and work with local students interested in going abroad or welcoming international students. My motivation for this study comes from my belief that every student, of any nationality, religious, racial or ethnic heritage, sexual orientation or disability, should have access to study abroad. From my professional experience, even though I was not a study abroad program coordinator, but a graduate assistant, I know how demanding the work is and that there is always more work to do than time available. I also know that many study abroad offices lack resources, both financial and personnel. However, I believe that in this globalized world, every student

has to take advantage of study abroad opportunities, and therefore, it is important that study abroad professionals are prepared to and know how to work with diverse student populations.

Organization of Thesis

In the following chapter I discuss the internationalization of higher education and its implications for students with disabilities. I summarize the benefits of study abroad and specifically discuss the potential benefits for students with disabilities, and also point out the problem of underrepresentation of students with disabilities in study abroad.

In Chapter III, I provide a literature review which first explores the theoretical framework that forms the basis for this study and its proposed recommendations, then examines how legal foundations are applied to study abroad and provides information on the research on students with disabilities and study abroad.

Following the literature review, I provide an overview of my methods, including participant selection and recruitment, data collection and analysis. I also discuss the limitations of this study.

Chapters V and VI report the findings of the current study. I identify nine themes from the interviews with the study abroad professionals and five themes from the interviews with the students with disabilities. In Chapter VII, I discuss my findings. The last chapter concludes with recommendations for improving the current and future practices of study abroad professionals when working with students with disabilities and also provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Internationalization of Higher Education

The number of students participating in study abroad or international educational exchange programs has grown tremendously in the last decade. According to UNESCO, over 2.8 million students were educated outside of their countries in 2007, in comparison with 1.7 million in 2000 (Institute of International Education). McLean, Heagney, & Gardner note that “while the increasing commodification of education and the globalization of the education market is a twentieth century phenomenon, the internationalization of education is not a new concept” (2003, p. 218). Traveling “elsewhere” to pursue knowledge and perspectives unavailable at home is nothing new. Hoffa suggests that this practice of leaving home to find new knowledge was established before the existence of nation-states. He notes that “home” first meant membership in a geographically local tribe or clan. Thus, in early societies, people would travel to other tribes to seek new knowledge and skills necessary for the survival of the tribe. Later, the Library of Alexandria, for example, attracted visitors from many lands. The wandering scholars of medieval times contributed to the development of universities. Student lists from the first universities show names from most of the countries of Europe, as well as from the Middle East, the Far East, North Africa, and the West Indies (Hoffa, 2007).

Benefits of Study Abroad

Just as they are today, students’ motivations to study abroad were based on a lack of suitable academic institutions in their own countries, or the interest to pursue new

knowledge outside of their homes. The contemporary benefits of studying outside of one's "home" are related to those of the past: 1) acquisition of substantial knowledge not known at home; 2) what one learns will benefit not only that individual, but also his/her home culture or country; 3) one gains not only academic learning but also learns how to work independently and adjust to a new place; and last but not least, 4) one acquires new perspectives on life and the self (Hoffa, 2007).

Brux and Fry cite several studies which explore the benefits of study abroad, among which is a new appreciation of other cultures as "not right or wrong, but simply different," (p. 509) an increase in students' tolerance in their approach to issues, a reduction of ethnocentrism, and new perspective about the human condition in the world (2010).

NAFSA: Association of International Educators (originally named the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers), the nonprofit professional association dedicated to international education, outlines three public policy benefits of study abroad:

- *Foreign Policy* - It emphasizes that "studying abroad should be the rule rather than the exception in U.S. higher education" as international exchanges are one of the most effective public diplomacy tools (Public Policy Benefits of Study Abroad).
- *National Security* - Having American students gain the language and cultural skills is very important for American national security as "according to an August 2007 U.S. GAO Report, almost a third of all State Department officers in language-designated positions overseas do not meet the necessary foreign language requirements" (Public Policy Benefits of Study Abroad).

- *Economic Security* - To advance the U.S.' position in the world's economy, American students need to gain international expertise and language skills as "currently, one in five U.S. jobs is linked to international trade, yet U.S. companies lose an estimated \$2 billion a year to insufficient cross-cultural guidance for their employees in multicultural positions" (Public Policy Benefits of Study Abroad).

Benefits of Study Abroad for Students with Disabilities

The benefits of study abroad are the same for students with disabilities, but in some cases may be even more significant. Understanding the world better and gaining international experience which will help students to compete in a global market are often pointed out by education abroad staff as some of the benefits of studying abroad. Because they experience a lower employment rate, this is especially significant for people with disabilities (Scheib, *Big Dreams, Special Needs*, 2007). The other significant benefit of study abroad for students with disabilities is the increase in their self-confidence and self-esteem. As Cerise Roth-Vinson, cited in Scheib's article, observes, "... once a student has accomplished navigating a foreign place, everything else that comes up in his or her life seems very doable. They've already proven they have the skills to get through a new situation, and this translates into a more independent life – and may even result in more career options" (Scheib, *Big Dreams, Special Needs*, 2007, p. 29).

In one of the few studies that explored the impact of study abroad experiences on students with disabilities, Shames and Alden point out that while it is always heartening to hear that study abroad experience has changed the ways people look at themselves and

the world, they find it particularly moving when these types of proclamations come from students “whose educational histories have made learning difficult, if not painful, in the past” (2005, p. 1). Their study focused on the impact of short-term study abroad program on the identity development of college students with learning disabilities (LD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD). The findings of this study reveal that the study abroad experience increased students’ intellectual and social curiosity. Several works cited by Shames & Alden state that students with LD and/or AD/HD are often perceived as being “bored” in the classroom (2005). One of the students who participated in the program said (Shames & Alden, 2005, p. 8):

When I came back to the US, into my communications class, I don’t know why, but I was more into the class. I really got a lot out of that class. I think if I didn’t go on the abroad program I still would have liked the class, but I wouldn’t be into it as much.

In addition to increased intellectual and social curiosity, the research revealed students’ increased intercultural knowledge and skills; perceived positive classroom learning outcomes; several participants claimed that the study abroad experience lessened their struggle to envision their future; students felt that through their participation in study abroad they were able to become “more similar” to their peers and their parents who had traveled before. This study also demonstrated that students with LD and/or AD/HD experienced an increase in self-confidence after participation in the study abroad program. These findings are particularly important as students with LD and/or AD/HD often have a diminished sense of self.

While Michael Sadler, a prominent English educationist, frequently quoted for his philosophy of comparative education, did not refer to or write about study abroad and/or

students with disabilities, in his work *How Far Can We Learn Anything of Practical Value from the Study of Foreign Systems of Education*, published in 1900, he makes a very important observation which is relevant for this thesis. He states that “in studying foreign systems of education, we should not forget that the things outside school matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret the things inside” (Phillips, 2006, pp. 45-46). Murray-Seegert, in her cross-cultural comparison study on the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream education, takes these “things outside school” and analyzes how they bring great complexity for students with disabilities as they interact with educational institutions (McLean, Heagney, & Gardner, 2003). Murray-Seegert’s ecological theory of diversity, while constructed around the interaction of students with disabilities and educational institutions, does not refer to the interaction between the study abroad environment and students with disabilities.

However, the four assumptions (McLean, Heagney, & Gardner, 2003, pp. 218-219) that this theory makes are highly relevant for the current study:

- 1) Human behavior arises from interaction between individuals and their environments;
- 2) The interaction is a “multi-directional process of mutual accommodation” in which the individual and elements of the environment continually affect and modify each other;
- 3) The environment in which the individual interacts is a “broadly conceived ecosystem in which the physical and social elements of the setting are interconnected with elements of the larger social construct” (for example, socio-economic structure, political system and cultural beliefs and values); and
- 4) An ecosystem includes not only objectively verifiable elements but also the elements as perceived, described or experienced by an individual.

The above assumptions demonstrate the importance of international educational experiences for any students, including students with disabilities. It is crucial that students with disabilities participate in study abroad programs as not only they will gain

new knowledge and perspectives from that experience, but they will also affect the environment just as the environment will affect them. For example, if a U.S. student with disability goes to China, s/he can affect the small community that s/he lives in that time, and perhaps bring awareness about disability as a human right. Since the interaction is a “multi-directional process of mutual accommodation,” (p. 218) where all the elements of the environment continually affect and modify each other, students with disabilities will not only experience a different culture by living in another country, but also will experience a different culture of disability. For example, a student coming to the USA might wonder why other people don’t rush to offer assistance while American students going to study in England might be surprised and frustrated by the barriers they encounter (McLean, Heagney, & Gardner, 2003).

Paralleled to the idea above, about the “multi-directional process of mutual accommodation in which the individual and elements of the environment continually affect and modify each other” (McLean, Heagney, & Gardner, 2003, p. 218), Susan Sygall, Christa Bucks and Carole Patterson argue that people with disabilities must be part of the educational exchange experience as it is both beneficial for the people with disabilities and for the exchange programs themselves (1997). Participants who go on these exchange programs need to accept not only the people in other cultures but also the diversity of people in their own country and throughout the world. The authors state that the most successful way to improve attitudes that will insure diversity and equality is through personal contact and exchange of information, and therefore, it’s very important that people with disabilities participate in international exchange. They argue that these exchange programs can empower people with and without disabilities to become active

members and future leaders in society. People with disabilities need to have the same rights and opportunities as people without disabilities. Not only can these exchange programs help students attain greater self-confidence and understanding of oneself as they develop independent thinking, but they can provide benefits for all humankind. Through interaction between people with and without disabilities, nations can achieve international understanding of disability rights and move towards intercultural peace and understanding. It all can begin with an exchange program, one friendship at a time (Sygall, Bucks, & Patterson, *A World of Options: A Guide to International Exchange, Community Service and Travel for Persons with Disabilities*, 1997).

Underrepresentation of Students with Disabilities in Study Abroad

While the benefits and increased popularity of international educational exchanges are documented, minority participation rates in study abroad remain disproportionately low (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella). Students with disabilities, in particular, have been excluded from study abroad participation. MIUSA conducted a survey in 2004 together with the Institute of International Education, and found that though participation of students with disabilities in study abroad programs has grown, it has been at a lesser rate than with students without disabilities (Dessof, 2006)

Johnson points out that students with disabilities are not encouraged to study abroad as there is a lack of a consistent process to recruit and advise students with disabilities for study abroad. She also notes that most colleges and universities lack knowledge about the accessibility of study sites for students with disabilities (Johnson, 2000).

As the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities marks a “paradigm shift” in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities, from the medical model of disability, where persons with disabilities are viewed as “objects” of charity and medical treatment, towards the social model of disability, where persons with disabilities are viewed as “subjects” with rights (UN Enable - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), inclusion of people with disabilities in international exchange is essential to ensure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as people without disabilities, including the right to study abroad.

CHAPTER III
UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY, STUDENT DEVELOPMENT,
AND STUDY ABROAD

The first part of this literature review explores the theoretical framework that forms the basis for this study and its proposed recommendations. The second part of the review examines how legal foundations are applied to study abroad and provides information on the research on students with disabilities and study abroad.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand current practices and experiences of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities in study abroad, it is at first necessary to examine three relevant theories – the social construction of disability, Chickering’s theory of student development, and Universal Design. The theory of the social construction of disability further increases our understating of how the practices of study abroad professionals might be affected depending on what perceptions they hold regarding disability. It also provides the implications for cross-cultural settings. Chickering’s theory of student development allows us to recognize the potential impact of the study abroad experience on identity development of students with disabilities. It allows us to look at study abroad as a potential environment for students with disabilities to develop competence. Finally, Universal Design provides a framework for us to understand how the current practices and experiences could be enhanced.

The Social Construction of Disability

The nature and meaning of disability is complex and debated. Tom Koch observes that there are two opposing camps: one that perceives disability as socially constructed, while the other one insists that it reflects a physical fact affecting quality of life. He uses an example of a classical visual paradox of “a white, goblet-shaped object that separates the facing silhouettes of two black cutout profiles” (p. 370) to demonstrate the debate visually, and to point out that people see disability either as a “white goblet” or “two black cutout profiles” (Koch, 2001, p. 370). They represent the medical and social models of disability. The medical model of disability assumes that being disabled is negative and abnormal. Disability is believed to be residing in the individual and therefore, the individual needs to be cured. The social model of disability points out that disability is a difference. It is not negative, rather, it is neutral. Disability does not reside in the individual. Instead, it is socially constructed through interaction between the individual and the society. Therefore, rather than curing the individual, it is necessary to change the interaction between the individual and society (Soneson, *Education Abroad Advising to Students with Disabilities*, 2009).

As Rao observes, the field of disability has been dominated by the medical model (Rao, 2006). Since the shift of looking at disability as a sociological construction has occurred, the analysis of disability is being done cross-culturally. Rao argues that cultures present various perceptions of ‘normality’ and thus, that contributes to the construction of disability. He points out that there are various roles assigned to people with disabilities within different cultures. He cites Gartner who gives an example of begging as a role

typically assigned in traditional cultures to groups of people who do not have protection of the family or the community (Rao, 2006).

Meyer argues that disability is strongly shaped by cultural context. Thus, this brings another layer to the complexity of the construction of this concept. Not only it is socially constructed, as was mentioned by other researchers, but it is also culturally constructed: “while most cultures display an awareness of phenomena that distinguish an individual with physical or mental limitations from the majority of peers, cultures differ greatly as to: which specific condition they recognize as a disability, how they interpret matters of causation and consequence, and what sort of countermanding actions they stipulate” (Meyer, 2010, p. 1). If disability is culturally constructed, and since cultural norms and beliefs vary greatly, the lives of people with disabilities will be affected greatly as well. Understanding this phenomenon is important in the study abroad context. Not only would it be important for study abroad professionals to be aware how their own culture shapes their perceptions of disability, but also it would be essential for them to recognize the cultural construction of disability as they work with students with disabilities planning to take a voyage to the places where their disability might be interpreted differently.

Yoshida also argues that disability is perceived and defined differently depending on the cultural context. Ingstad and Whyte, as cited in Yoshida’s article, state that some societies view certain kinds of impairments or biological characteristics as “inhuman” (Yoshida, 1999). It might be common for many cultures to see disability as “a manifestation of misfortune caused by others (e.g., witchcraft, sorcery, ‘evil eye’), caused by oneself (e.g., carelessness, breach of taboo), and/or caused by fate, nature of the will

of God” (Yoshida, 1999). Religion, in some countries, can also take a part in constructing certain views on disability.

Mutua summarizes the work of McCarthy and Pierce, and states that depending on the cultural context, a person might be ascribed ability or disability. Therefore, “the same body... placed in a different cultural context could become ‘enabled’ or ‘disabled’ based on the social and cultural construction of ability and/or disability within that cultural context. Moreover, he pushes this idea of cultural context further, and notes that “in the country of the blind, sightedness is viewed as a disabling condition” (Mutua, 2001, pp. 103-104). In addition to that, he argues that everyday knowledge is constructed by visual metaphors. Thus, if in Kenya, people with disabilities are not seen in public, while in the US they are seen, one might assume that there are more people with disabilities in the US than in Kenya, when in reality it could be the opposite.

Understanding that disability is strongly shaped by cultural context is vital when working with students with disabilities as disability is not viewed similarly in all countries. Johnson emphasizes that study abroad staff must be aware of this as they advise students with disabilities. For example, in certain countries, it is considered acceptable to carry a person with a disability up the stairs and therefore, students need to be aware of these cultural differences and study abroad advisers need to make sure students are comfortable with different ways of accommodations in a particular country (2000).

Chickering’s Student Development Theory

In order to further understand the implications of study abroad for students with disabilities, it is necessary to visit the literature on student development. For the purpose

of this study, I utilize Arthur Chickering's theory of student development. Chickering's theory was first introduced in 1969 and then revised in 1993. The theory was developed after the research Chickering completed between 1959 and 1965 at Goddard College, which focused on evaluating the impact of innovative curricular practices on student development. Chickering's theory is relevant to this study because it urges student affairs staff to create an environment to facilitate student development. In this research I consider study abroad as a potential environment for students with disabilities to develop healthy identities. Since conventional learning environments often can create the negative connotations of the term "disability" due to the fact that achievement is reflected in test scores, it is important to examine study abroad as an environment for students with disabilities where they can learn to deem themselves as competent (Nichols & Quaye, 2009).

Chickering's theory outlines seven vectors of development that contribute to the formation of identity. The term vectors of development is used "because each seems to have direction and magnitude – even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than by a straight line" (p. 66). He referred to these vectors as "major highways for journeying toward individuation" (p. 66). The progression is not linear as students may move through these vectors at different rates while dealing with issues from more than one vector at the same time, and as the vectors often may interact with other and students reexamine issues associated with vectors they had previously worked through. Chickering's theory considers emotional, ethical, interpersonal, and intellectual aspects of student development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

The seven vectors are: 1) developing competence; 2) managing emotions; 3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence; 4) developing mature interpersonal relationships; 5) establishing identity; 6) developing purpose; and 7) developing integrity (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

The first vector, *Developing Competence*, encompasses intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competences. Intellectual competence is linked to acquisition of critical thinking and reasoning skills, “development of ‘intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic sophistication’” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 67). Physical competence includes involvement in athletic and recreational activities, as well as artistic and manual activities. Interpersonal competence refers to development of communication skills and ability to work effectively with others.

Managing Emotions is the second vector which refers to students’ ability “to recognize and accept emotions, as well as to appropriately express and control them” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 67).

The third vector, *Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence*, focuses on the student gaining emotional independence – “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (p. 68). Further, this includes the development of “instrumental independence” (p. 68) which refers to self-direction, problem-solving, and mobility (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

The fourth vector, *Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships*, involves the “ability to accept individuals for who they are, to respect differences, and to appreciate commonalities” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 68).

Establishing Identity, the fifth vector, is centered on developing a secure sense of self, self-acceptance, and self-esteem, being comfortable with one's gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation.

Developing Purpose, Chickering's sixth vector, includes the development of clear vocational goals, establishment of one's commitments to personal interests and activities.

Finally, the last vector, *Developing Integrity*, consists of three components: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. First, students learn to balance their own interests with the interests of others. Second, while others' beliefs are respected and acknowledged, one maintains his/her established beliefs and values. Lastly, students' "self-interest is balanced by a sense of social responsibility" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 69).

As Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn suggest, "Chickering's theory has had a significant impact on the development of proactive and international interventions in higher education" (p. 81). As students should gain competence in the seven vectors in their experience of higher education, it is important that student affairs staff create an environment to facilitate student development. In this study I consider study abroad as a potential environment for students with disabilities to gain competence in all or some of the seven vectors.

Universal Design

The key to our understanding the current practices of the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad is to consider the applicability of the principles of Universal Design to study abroad. As study abroad experience becomes a degree requirement in many institutions, the need to identify and implement effective strategies

to meet the needs of a more diverse student population becomes essential. “This is not simply an issue of disability access, but one of program design” (Soneson & Cordano, 2009, p. 270). While students with disabilities have been supported in and accommodated to study abroad, study abroad offices in the U.S. “tend to focus on the needs of a particular student applying for a particular study abroad site” (p. 270) rather than being applied more generally or shared broadly (Soneson & Cordano, 2009). Soneson states that Universal Design can provide “a framework to effectively increase the number of students studying abroad by creating and expanding supportive environments designed to meet a wide range of student needs” (2009, p. 270)

The theory of universal design, which originated from architecture, is defined as the “design of products and environments usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (The Center for Universal Design - About UD). The concept was coined by architect Ronald Mace in 1985, who himself had a disability (Saito, 2006). “The theory of universal design strives to create optimal conditions for accommodating the changing needs of multiple constituents” (Nichols & Quayle, 2009, p. 51). Akin to the social construction model of disability, universal design also supports the idea that disability is socially constructed and rather than defining it as an individual’s problem, it aims to “lower environmental barriers to participation” (Saito, 2006, p. 463). It is important to note that while universal design incorporates accessible design, not every accessible design can be regarded as universal design as “universal design does not necessarily focus only on disability” (p. 463), rather, it “broadly defines the targeted users and the nature of diversity” (Saito, 2006, p. 463). While the principles of universal design have been implemented in product and landscape

design, architecture, engineering, and workforce (Saito, 2006), they have been also used in K-12 and higher education.

In a learning environment, Universal Design strives to maximize learning and access by all students and not just those with disabilities by placing emphasis on various factors outside of the individual student (Nichols & Quaye, 2009). As Nichols & Quaye explain, “within an educational environment, universal design provides flexibility in classroom instruction, assignments, activities, and collaborative ventures” (Nichols & Quaye, 2009, p. 51). Instead of approaching learning as “one-size-fits-all” (p. 51) mentality, educators tailor their approaches to students’ differing learning styles and preferences (Nichols & Quaye, 2009). According to Junco & Salter, students with disabilities face numerous difficulties as they are expected to adapt to dominant norms and practices in culturally exclusive classrooms and physically inaccessible campus environments, rather than having the environment accommodate to student needs (Nichols & Quaye, 2009). Educators “must revise the curriculum, contextual factors, pedagogical strategies, and learning philosophies... to improve learning and development among students with disabilities” (p. 51) instead of simply assisting them – thus, focusing on the overarching educational system rather than focusing on the problem residing in the student (Rose & Meyer, 2000, as cited in Nichols & Quaye, 2009).

The implementation of Universal Design in education allows to proactively have structures and support systems in place in order to avoid a temporary adjustment based on a specific request and the need to modify the environment specifically for each individual (Soneson & Cordano, 2009). It can decrease the need to retrofit an environment to address individual student needs, and increase efficiency through proactively designed

structures (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). In a physical environment, Universal Design provides access to myriad users and not just to a student using a wheelchair. For example, a ramp to a building can be useful also to a delivery person carrying large packages or to a for a parent pushing a baby stroller (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003).

To understand the value of Universal Design in a variety of settings, it is important to consider its seven guiding principles (Soneson & Cordano, 2009).

Principle 1: Equitable Use

The design is accessible by and useful to people with diverse abilities. In a classroom, for example, “the same means of use is provided for all students, avoiding differential treatment or stigmatizing of students” (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003, p. 41). For instance, providing class notes online so that they can be accessed by all students, regardless of hearing ability, English proficiency, learning or attention disorders, or note-taking skill level (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003).

Principle 2: Flexibility

A wide range of individual preferences and abilities are accommodated. Choices are provided. An example in instruction includes providing students with the choice of assessment methods (conducting an online project, writing a paper, or taking an exam).

Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive

The goal of this principle is to eliminate any unnecessary complexity. “Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level” (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003, p. 44). In an educational setting, an example can be a straightforward and comprehensive grading

rubric where expectations for exam performance are clearly laid out (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003).

Principle 4: Perceptible Information

Regardless of the user's sensory abilities, information is effectively communicated to the user. A classroom example may include the use of PowerPoint as a supplemental mode of communication (Soneson & Cordano, 2009) to effectively communicate to students with diverse needs (ESL, learning style, attention).

Principle 5: Tolerance for Error

“The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions” (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003, p. 44). In a learning environment, it anticipates variation in prerequisite skills and in student learning rates. Rather than submitting a final product at the end, students are given an option to turn in a draft first to receive feedback to integrate into the final version. The goal is to “promote mastery and acknowledge variability” (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003, p. 45).

Principle 6: Low Physical Effort

The design is used to minimize fatigue and increase efficiency. In a learning environment, if physical effort is not a requirement of a course, this design minimizes physical effort to maximize attention to learning. An example of this principle is allowing students to write exams or paper using a word processor. “This common technology maintains the integrity and purpose of the task while reducing unnecessary physical effort for students with fine motor or handwriting difficulties, or extreme organizational weaknesses while providing options for those who are more adept and comfortable composing at the computer” (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003, p. 45).

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use

Considerations for appropriate size and space allow for approach, reach, manipulations, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, mobility, and communication needs. An example in an educational setting is to place chairs or desks in a round seating arrangement to structure the environment where students with hearing impairments or attention difficulties can see and face other students during class discussion (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003).

Soneson & Cordano (2009) state the value of Universal Design for study abroad is multifold:

- 1) Rather than addressing each individual request as it arises, this design allows study abroad professionals to be more efficient “because new structures and adaptations do not need to be created on short notice” (p. 277).
- 2) As program materials provide information on these structures and accommodations, students can make an informed assessment of the program's environment.
- 3) “By having a variety of accommodations in place as a permanent feature of the program,” (p. 277) the amount of effort dedicated to foster disclosure can be reduced.
- 4) Universal Design allows the program staff to be in a better position to “respond to requests and accommodations needs as they arise” (p. 278) due to the fact that they would have a more flexible on-site environment.

Further, Soneson & Cordano (2009) suggest study abroad programs to consider incorporating concepts of Universal Design in the five environments in the study abroad context:

- 1) *Physical Environment*, which includes residential facility, classroom, program office, and public space/excursions. For example, offering multiple housing options, offering course in classrooms on several floors, including the ground floor.
- 2) *Academic Environment*, which includes teaching materials, teaching styles, discussion format, and information dissemination. Posting syllabi to the website in advance, for example, will allow some students to have those syllabi translated into Braille or large print, but will also be useful for other students for academic credit purposes.
- 3) *Cultural Environment* includes excursions, physical space, interaction, and organization/notification. For example, the study abroad program website or other promotional materials may include the list of excursions and social activities offered and also provide links about accessibility of these venues.
- 4) *Informational Environment* includes program materials. Program materials, for example, may provide information on support services and student groups in the overseas local community.
- 5) *Policy/Programmatic Environment* refers to statements, visual statements, staffing, evaluation and feedback, promotional materials, etc. An example would be ensuring that promotional materials reflect the diversity of

participants, and the provision of training to increase awareness of diverse needs.

As the above information suggests, there are important benefits of utilizing the theory of Universal Design in study abroad. Not only does it allow study abroad professionals to be proactive in the process of inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad and eliminate the challenges of addressing each individual request one at a time, but it also creates a more welcoming environment for students with disabilities, which is important for the increase of the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad.

Understanding the Legal Issues in Study Abroad

As stated earlier, the number of students participating in study abroad had tremendously increased in the past decade. However, students with disabilities remain underrepresented in study abroad. While the demand is there, institutions have not kept up with it. Understanding what rights American students can enjoy while participating in an overseas program (Couchman, 2010) is essential when it comes to exploring the current practices and experiences of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities in study abroad.

US federal civil rights laws and state laws protect people with disabilities who are U.S. citizens and who are citizens of other countries currently present in the United States. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Air Carriers Access Act directly affect travelers with disabilities (Sygall, Bucks, & Patterson, *A World of Options: A Guide to International Exchange, Community Service and Travel for Persons*

with Disabilities, 1997). “The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. It also applies to the United States Congress” (A Guide to Disability Rights Laws).

The Air Carrier Access Act requires air carriers to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in air travel (Sygall, Bucks, & Patterson, 1997).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is “a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability” (Your Rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 2006). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states (Rehabilitation Act of 1973):

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705 (20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service.

The above laws protect the rights of people with disabilities from the U.S. to travel abroad and have access to equal international educational opportunities; these laws also protect students coming to the US through international exchange programs.

However, a question arises whether the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act will protect students with disabilities abroad, and therefore, below I explore how these laws apply to extraterritoriality.

When it comes to study abroad, the extent to which these disability discrimination laws apply to extraterritoriality, or the exception from the application of local law,

remains unresolved (Kanter, 2003). Kanter (p. 36) poses several questions on the application of the ADA and Section 504 to study abroad programs:

Section 504 and the ADA prohibit colleges and universities from discriminating against students with disabilities and require them to provide reasonable accommodations. But how far does this discrimination mandate extend? Does it extend to schools and programs beyond the borders of the United States? Must a college accept a student with a disability into a study abroad program if that student requires accommodations to participate? Is a college required to pay for a sign language interpreter to accompany a student participating in a program overseas?

It is not surprising that colleges and universities interpret these questions differently as neither Section 504 nor the ADA provide any information pertaining to the application of the laws to Americans overseas. Kanter (2003) presents a favorable argument regarding the extraterritorial application of the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act to study abroad and illustrates the cases involving decisions on accommodations requests in study abroad programs.

In the case of *Bird v. Lewis and Clark College (1996)* an American student who uses a wheelchair and participated in a college overseas program in Australia, “was not permitted to participate in all activities, and was carried rather than provided with alternate means of transportation and accessibility” (Kanter, 2003, p. 307). This was the first and thus far only case, as Kanter (2003) observes, when the district court recognized the applicability of the ADA and Section 504 to a study abroad program. According to Sygall and Scheib (2005), the district court wrote: “the ongoing requirement of adherence to the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA did not evaporate when Lewis and Clark College faculty accompanied Lewis and Clark College students on a Lewis and Clark college sponsored program overseas” (p. 44). Although the accommodations had to be provided

overseas, “the plaintiff was an American student who attended an American university’s overseas program, taught by American faculty, employed by an American college, which is incorporated within the United States, and was doing business in the United States” (Kanter, 2003, p. 307). Therefore, the student was entitled to protections under Section 504 and the ADA. The court granted the plaintiff a remedy on a breach of contract claim but denied her claims that the Lewis and Clark College did not comply with the ADA and Section 504 in her overseas program (Kanter, 2003) as there were a number of examples that the college accommodated Bird’s disability by hiring two helpers, paying for her to fly while other students took buses and trains, and providing alternative lodgings (Bird v. Lewis & Clark College, 2002).

In the case of *Arizona State University* (Office of Civil Rights, 2011), a deaf student was accepted to study abroad in Ireland and requested that his University provide a sign language interpreter for him while abroad in Ireland. After his request was denied, he filed a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the United States Department of Education. The OCR analyzed his request and concluded that Title II and Section 504 did not apply extraterritorially, in other words, neither Section 504 nor Title II requires the University to provide auxiliary aids and services in overseas programs. The decision to deny the student’s request for a sign language interpreter was made by Arizona State University based on the facts that this study abroad program was optional and it was run by Butler University rather than by Arizona State University. Further, the associate general counsel at Arizona State explained that the University has covered the costs of accommodations under other circumstances, when, for example, a deaf student went to Mexico. The ASU covered the costs of interpreter services because the

participation in the study abroad program was required for completing that student's degree and because that study abroad program was run by Arizona State University (Hebel, 2002).

The case of the *St. Scholastica College (OCR 1992)* illustrates different results. In this case, a deaf student also requested interpreter services while abroad in Ireland. The OCR ruled that the student's request for the College of Saint Scholastica, in Minnesota, should be accepted and that the College should pay for an interpreter to accompany a deaf student while studying abroad in Ireland. The OCR officials said that "the law prohibited institutions that receive federal funds from keeping a student from participating in a program because of a physical or mental handicap" (Hebel, 2002).

However, as Hebel noted, campus officials and some legal experts remained unclear of what the law requires of institutions as neither the ADA nor the Rehabilitation Act specifically say that the laws apply outside of the United States, while "in other sections of the disabilities act and in other laws, Congress has specified that such provisions do apply overseas" (2002).

The above cases demonstrated the complexity and ambiguity of the laws in regards to study abroad programs. While universities and colleges may claim that these laws do not extend to extraterritoriality in some cases, like in the case of the Arizona State University, "in those cases in which American universities operate or contract with a foreign university to run a program for American students, the presumption against extraterritoriality may be overcome, and the protections of the ADA and section 504 should apply" (Kanter, 2003, p. 315).

Kanter (2003) restates the purpose of the ADA - “to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate to end discrimination against individuals with disabilities and to bring those individuals into the economic and social mainstream of American life” (p. 303) and emphasizes that study abroad and travel have become part of American mainstream life. Thus, colleges and universities need to be aware of the implications of internationalization of higher education for students with disabilities and of the legal issues surrounding the protections of students with disabilities. Since the laws are so ambiguous when it comes to their applicability to study abroad, institutions have interpreted these laws differently. This suggests that colleges and universities may or may not be aware of the different legal issues surrounding the protections of students with disabilities and thus, their practices could reflect this awareness or unawareness.

Students with Disabilities and Study Abroad

According to the Open Doors Report published by the Institution of International Education, the number of students with disabilities who studied abroad in 2009/10 reached over 1,800. *Table 1* indicates that the percentage of students with disabilities who studied abroad increased to 4% in 2009/10, compared to 3.6% in 2008/09. This can be viewed in the context of the overall increase of U.S. students studying abroad: 270,604 U.S. students studied abroad for credit in 2009/10, compared to 260,327 the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2011).

Table 1: Students with Disabilities in Education Abroad Breakdown

| Disability Status: | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No Disability | 96.7% | 97.0% | 96.4% | 96.0% |
| Disability | 2.6% | 3.0% | 3.6% | 4.0% |
| Type of disability: | | | | |
| Learning Disability | 50.5% | 47.0% | 48.1% | 52.2% |
| Mental Disability | 25.4% | 28.6% | 24.6% | 20.9% |
| Physical Disability | 8.0% | 8.1% | 7.2% | 5.5% |
| Sensory Disability | 5.8% | 5.3% | 5.1% | 6.5% |
| Other Disability | 10.2% | 11.0% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| # of Institutions Responding | 116 | 150 | 207 | 210.0 |
| Total Students with Disabilities Reported | 1,006 | 1,401 | 1,874 | 1,827 |

Mobility International USA notes that many campuses still do not track students with disabilities participating in study abroad and therefore, the increase in the percentages of students with disabilities studying abroad can be attributed in part to campuses starting to collect this data. As cited on the MIUSA website, the 2008 U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies indicates that students with disabilities comprise 9-11% of the U.S. campuses' student population (Open Doors Disability & Education Abroad Statistics, 2011).

The statistics suggest that while there has been an increase in the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad, they still remain an underrepresented group in international education.

Why are students with disabilities underrepresented in study abroad? To understand this question, researchers have looked at what perceptions students have towards study abroad and whether these perceptions contribute to students' with disabilities low participation in study abroad. Matthews, Hameister, and Hosley conducted interviews with students with disabilities to access perceived barriers to participation. They found that the three highest areas of concern were lack of knowledge, lack of available assistive devices and services, and financial barriers (Matthews, Hameister, & Hosley, 1998). Hurst, cited in Johnson's work, identifies lack of family support, lack of faculty and staff support, and the limited ability of overseas sites to accommodate students with disabilities as barriers to study abroad for students with disabilities (2000). In a survey of Big Ten institutions conducted by Aune and Soneson, study abroad and disability services staff expressed the following concerns associated with studying abroad with a disability: identifying accessible sites; determining the nature and scope of their institution's obligations to disabled students; providing specific types of accommodations, such as sign language interpreting and adaptive technology; and finding funds to assist students in meeting the extra costs associated with studying abroad with a disability (Johnson, 2000).

As colleges and universities seek to expand the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad, international education staff needs to understand the five interrelated concepts: individualization, barriers and accommodations, disability spread, inclusion, and collaboration (Hameister, Matthews, Hosley, & Groff, 1999). Hameister, Matthews, Hosley, and Groff call attention to the fact that students with disabilities are first of all individuals and have their own unique backgrounds, skills, and capacities. Two

students with the same type of disability will have different study experiences based on their individual characteristics and background, and thus it is important to involve students with disabilities in the planning process as “each student will be the best resource as to his/her needs for accommodation” (Hameister, Matthews, Hosley, & Groff, 1999, p. 86). The authors of the article suggest that potential accommodations and barriers need to be identified on an individual basis and that staff needs to be very conscious of their own attitudes so that they do not get distracted by the student’s disability but rather focus on each student’s specific abilities and interests. They point out that students with disabilities want to participate in an inclusionary study abroad program and that international education staff need to collaborate with different contributors, including students with disabilities (Hameister, Matthews, Hosley, & Groff, 1999).

In addition to the above concepts which are important to understand when working with students with disabilities, there are other key things international education staff needs to consider when making conscious efforts to include those with disabilities, including disclosure and planning, flexibility, and laws and culture (Katz, 2007). Failure to disclose disability in a timely manner can result in complications for the student and the host institution. Stephen Ferst, quoted in Katz’s article, notes that “it is not altogether clear if there is really more disclosure or if we are seeing more students with disabilities who are studying abroad” (2007, p. 54). In addition to encouraging students to disclose their disability early, advisers also should encourage students to start planning as early as 9-12 months in advance. Van Slyke, interviewed for Katz’s article, gave an example of a student who needed to bring a guide dog to a Latin American country. Since students, like all visitors, must abide by the laws of the host country, in order to bring an animal

into the country, the country required a six-month quarantine requirement for dogs (Katz, 2007). Flexibility is another factor in good advising practices. If a program is not appropriate for a student, a good adviser would not discourage a student but would consider a range of options. Soneson, interviewed for Katz's article, says: "We must be prepared that not every site can accommodate every student... all the variables are part of the conversation to identify an appropriate experience" (2007, p. 55). The variables include the length of study, rural vs. urban location, coursework vs. internship, etc. Last not but least, advisers should not characterize a country as accessible or inaccessible based only on its legislation or technological advancement as "there are countries where a student with a mobility disability may find the buildings have no elevators but where people find it natural to offer assistance in other ways, for example to lift a student over an embankment" (Soneson, as cited in Katz, 2007, p. 57).

While some students can be fine with others lifting them, others can be a little bit put off by this due to certain expectations regarding accessibility or accommodations which are influenced by students' cultural backgrounds and expectations. Wherever a student with disability goes on a study abroad program, his/her experiences will be impacted by his/her cultural expectations. McLean, Heagney, & Garner state that every student who studies abroad experiences a degree of cultural shock, but for students with disabilities the concept of cultural shock has an additional dimension as students will also encounter a different culture of disability. The authors give an example of two cases studies where in the first case, an American student with multiple disabilities requested more services than typically provided in Australia, including a scooter-accessible transport for her motorized scooter. In the second case, a British student with a learning

disability had a number of requests including use of oral examinations instead of written examinations and additional tutoring. In both cases the host institutions could not support all these requests and while students felt that their expectations were not met, staff felt that their demands were unreasonable (2003). This article reinforces the idea of differences in cross-cultural expectations, and how these differences can be particularly important to take into consideration when working with students with disabilities.

While the current literature cited above provides significant insights into the issues surrounding the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad, it is evident that there is a lack of research conducted on this topic. While there are few studies which focus on the perceptions of students with disabilities regarding study abroad, there is very limited published work regarding the actual experiences of these students arranging their study abroad. Moreover, there is a lack of research on what impact study abroad has on students with disabilities. In addition to that, as the literature review pointed out, there is a lack of published studies on the experiences and practices of study abroad professionals. This study aims to fill in the gaps in the literature by examining the current practices and experiences of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities in study abroad. By exploring the present situation we can ensure the enhancement of future practices and experiences. In addition to that, this study looks into how study abroad can increase the student development of students with disabilities. This research also includes insight from a faculty member who leads study abroad program each year. The role of the faculty has been often omitted from the discussion of the collaboration when working with students with disabilities. The study suggests that we must look at faculty as key players in ensuring the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Overview

To fill in the gaps in the literature, through this research I aimed to gain a better understanding and knowledge of what the current practices and experiences of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities are. This study was designed to answer the following questions:

Central research question:

- What are the current practices and experiences of the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad programs?

Sub-questions:

with respect to study abroad professionals:

- What are study abroad professionals' needs, considerations, motivations and challenges when working with students with disabilities?
- How can the needs and challenges be addressed?
- How can/do study abroad professionals encourage students with disabilities to study abroad?

with respect to students with disabilities:

- What are the perceptions of students with disabilities of the current practices of study abroad professionals?
- Does the study abroad experience for students with disabilities, as identity development experience, support Chickering's theory of student development?

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The participants in this study are 10 study abroad professionals (including 6 campus study abroad staff members, 2 program provider staff members based in the United States, and 2 study abroad professionals based overseas), 5 students with disabilities (2 students studied abroad in developed countries, 2 in developing countries, and 1 studied abroad in both developed and developing countries), and 1 faculty member who leads a study abroad program once or twice a year (Appendix C).

Participants were recruited through the SECUSS-L listserv. SECUSS-L is an “unmoderated, open listserv that provides a place for professionals who work in education abroad to share their experiences and knowledge” (Resource Library). Advisers, program directors, administrators, as well as graduate and undergraduate students can post study abroad scholarships announcements, job openings, ask questions about various issues related to the field of education abroad, share their experiences, ask advice on working with certain populations of students, and much more. I posted the description of the study and asked any interested study abroad professionals to contact me if they wanted to become a part of this study. I also asked to the listserv members to pass my recruitment message to any students with disabilities or study abroad professionals who may be interested in participating in this study.

Data Collection

My data collection was based on the open-ended interview approach. I had a list of the same questions that I asked each participant. This approach is often used to “minimize variation in the questions posed to interviewees” (Patton, 2002, p. 164). The

benefits of using this interview approach lie in its ability to minimize bias that comes from having different interviews for different people. As Patton notes, “the weakness of this approach is that it does not permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written” (Patton, 2002, p. 164). To compensate for this weakness, I used semi-structured interview questions: I had a set of fixed questions that I asked participants (see Appendices A & B); but I gave them an opportunity and time to bring up some of their questions and concerns, and I followed up with additional spontaneous questions to gain clarity on different topics. In addition to that, I allowed for a shift in the sequences of the questions based on where the answers to the previous questions brought us.

Patton suggests six kinds of questions which can be asked during an interview: 1) experience and behavior questions; 2) opinion and values questions; 3) feeling questions; 4) knowledge questions; 5) sensory questions; and 6) background/demographic questions. As he notes, it is important to distinguish these types when planning an interview. These distinctions are particularly important for designing the inquiry strategy, focusing on priorities for inquiry, and ordering the questions in some sequence (Patton, 2002). My questions were mainly of three types: 1) experience and behavior questions; 2) opinion and values questions; and 3) background/demographic questions. Having the importance of putting my questions into the above categories in my mind allowed me to focus on priorities for my inquiry and ordering the questions in a sequence from most important to least important for my inquiry. Since my main research question was to explore the actual experiences of the process of arranging study abroad for students with disabilities, questions which fell under the category “experience and behavior” were prioritized and

asked first. For example, the following experience and behavior questions were asked of study abroad professionals: What has been most challenging about your experience working with students with disabilities interested in study abroad? What has been most rewarding about your experience working with students with disabilities interested in study abroad? And to students: How did you learn about study abroad programs offered through your institution? What challenges did you experience in the process of arranging your study abroad? After the “experience and behavior” questions, I asked “opinion and values questions” as I found them important for better understanding perceptions and opinions of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities about the topic: How do you think study abroad might be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities? What factors do you think prevent students with disabilities from studying abroad? “Background and demographic” questions were often omitted as some of this information had slipped through the interview when study abroad professionals, for example, explained their roles and described the institutions they worked for, or when students mentioned what their majors were.

I conducted the interviews with the participants over the telephone. The average length of the interviews was 25-30 minutes, ranging from 15 to 40 minutes as the minimum and maximum lengths.

Data Analysis

When deciding whether to code my data in-progress or at the end, I considered pros and cons of two approaches. Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1984 cited by Seidman suggest that data analysis and data gatherings should

be integrated. They suggest conducting several interviews, analyzing them and then conducting further interviews based on what is found (1998). The advantage of this approach is that it allows the researcher to shape further questions and focus which might uncover some of the new themes in the next interviews or help identify what is going on at the earlier stage so that more attention is paid to the themes in the following interviews. Coding the data at the end allows the researcher to see the data as a whole without “imposing meaning from one participant’s interviews on the next” (Seidman, 1998, p. 96). Seidman states that while it is not possible to achieve the pure separation of generating from analyzing data, it is possible to avoid any in-depth analysis of the interview data until one has completed all the interviews (1998). He clarifies that he does not suggest to avoid considering what interviewees have just heard in order not to contaminate the next interview and points out that he himself constantly lives with the interviews, running them over in his mind and thinking about the next (Seidman, 1998).

After considering these two data analysis processes, I decided to combine the two, as explained below, with an emphasis on analyzing data at the end. I chose to transcribe and analyze my data in-depth at the end because I wanted to see the data set as a whole and compare the data to see the differences and similarities of the answers to the same questions by different participants. Because I was taking a class on Qualitative Data Analysis and Collection while still conducting my interviews, I coded and analyzed three interviews earlier. They were some of my last interviews and though I did have to find themes for the classroom exercise activity, I tried to keep my data analysis and collection consistent and therefore did not change my questions or focus after those three interviews.

After conducting my initial interviews, but without transcribing them, I also reflected on what I had learned so far and what follow-up questions I could ask in my next interviews. This allowed me to revise my interviews by thinking of what questions I did not ask but should have in order to understand the topic better. For example, in my first interview with a student with a disability I focused on what his experience was like arranging his study abroad. I did not, however, inquire about his opinion on what he thought prevented students with disabilities from studying abroad. After interviews with study abroad professionals this question was brought up and I believe it was important to hear students' perspectives on it as well. Therefore, in my further interviews, I brought up this question to both study abroad professionals and students with disabilities.

After recording each interview I transferred audio records to my computer and erased the audio recordings on the voice recorder. My computer is password protected so I was the only person who could access the audio records. At the end of conducting all my interviews (except for the three interviews which I transcribed earlier for my Qualitative Data Analysis and Collection class), I personally transcribed all the interviews as it allowed me to increase my familiarity with the data.

After transcribing my data, I decided to go into the data analysis with an inductive approach – coming to the transcripts “with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). I chose the inductive approach instead of the deductive approach to avoid key themes being “obscured, reframed or left invisible because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by deductive data analysis” (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). My analytic approach is “generic.” In my analysis I do not follow a specific tradition of

qualitative research, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, discourse analysis, or narrative analysis. My rationale for using the general inductive approach is that:

The *general inductive approach* provides a convenient and efficient way of analysing qualitative data for many research purposes. The outcomes of analysis may be indistinguishable from those derived from a grounded theory approach. However, unlike grounded theory, there is no emphasis on learning new technical terms such as “open coding” and “axial coding.” For this reason, many researchers are likely to find using a general inductive approach more straightforward than some of the traditional approaches to qualitative data analysis (Thomas, 2003, p. 9).

Before beginning coding, I read through the text of each interview in detail. Then I began coding the data by going through the text and looking at separate text segments which I assigned to different categories. I used gerunds, nouns, or short phrases to name each category and penciled each next to the relevant text segment. Then I went over the same text two more times to identify other themes which I did not notice before or to edit or delete the previous categories I identified. After going through each interview to identify categories, I created Microsoft Word documents, each document taking the label of a category, and then I copied and pasted those text segments into themes. I indicated from what interview those text segments were taken from by writing *Interview 1: Mary* or *Interview 2: Kelly*, for example. I assigned new names to the participants to ensure confidentiality. Some of the text segments were coded into more than one category and some of the text was not coded into any category if it was not relevant to the research. I carefully reviewed each category and within each category I compared and contrasted different views and insights and selected core quotes to convey the theme of each category. Then I examined the different categories, comparing them to each other, linking them if they were similar to “reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories” (Thomas, 2003, p. 6).

Finally, after combining and reviewing the categories, nine themes emerged from the interviews with the study abroad professionals: disclosure; collaboration; training or lack of it; cost & funding; diversity increase in study abroad as motivator; tailored outreach; perceived benefits; preconceptions and misconceptions about disability; students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. And five themes emerged from the interviews with the students with disabilities: the impact of study abroad; perceived factors preventing students with disabilities from studying abroad; confronting doubts; tailored approach; study abroad professionals dealing with students with disabilities for the first time.

Limitations

Due to the time, location, and money constraints, I had to conduct phone interviews. The phone interviews allowed participants to be relaxed despite having their interviews being recorded, because though I asked them whether I could audio-record the interviews, they did not see an actual device which can sometimes distract participants in face-to-face interviews. However, the biggest limitation of conducting phone interviews is that it does not allow for a researcher to observe nonverbal cues which often generate the data itself or suggest a researcher to concentrate more on a specific question if what a researcher sees as a reaction to the question does not correspond to the actual answer.

Another limitation is that those who participated in my study were students with disabilities who successfully were able to arrange their study abroad, and while several issues came into light in terms of their study abroad arrangement; this research lacks

information about the experiences of students with disabilities who ended up not going to study abroad.

In addition to that, when implementing a qualitative inquiry strategy, it is recommended to use a practice of “triangulation” to collect data. As Patton notes, triangulation can provide the validity of the findings as it strengthens a study. To strengthen my study it would have been helpful to complement the interviews with focus groups.

CHAPTER V

CURRENT PRACTICES – STUDY ABROAD PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Nine major themes emerged from the interviews with study abroad professionals which reflect current practices of inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad.

The nine themes are (listed in no particular order of significance):

- Disclosure
- Collaboration
- Training or Lack of It
- Cost & Funding
- Diversity Increase in Study Abroad as Motivator
- Tailored Outreach
- Perceived Benefits
- Preconceptions and Misconceptions about Disability
- Students with Disabilities and their Peers without Disabilities

Disclosure

One of the major overlying themes that became evident throughout the majority of the interviews with study abroad professionals was *disclosure*. Eight out of ten study abroad professionals discussed students' self-disclosure in the interviews. Disclosure was brought up by some study abroad professionals when discussing some of the challenges that they face when working with students with disabilities:

Kelly:

The disclosure issue is huge because I've had students who don't disclose. I've literally had a student arrive and I looked at her and thought, "Oh my God, you have cerebral palsy," and she would never disclose it on any medical form... Of course, under the federal law she doesn't have to disclose it at all, but I was extremely concerned because she fell repeatedly, and if she fell and wasn't able to talk, who would be an interpreter for her in the hospital?... When this student arrived, I called her university's office just to say: "What the hell you were thinking?!"... I was hoping to use the off the record networking.

Richard:

I think the biggest problem is probably nondisclosure; that a student fails to disclose a disability. Particularly, as I said it's the hidden disabilities, if it's a disability such as learning difficulty, all sorts of issues, ADD, or something along those lines. It could be a health concern, a health issue, whether it's, let's say an eating disorder, or some sort of psychological disorder, so we've had problems with students failing to disclose those things to us.

Susan:

I think one of the most challenging aspects of any of the study abroad offices is to encourage disclosure. Sometimes students with disabilities are hesitant to disclose a disability. Sometimes they don't even realize that it will be a challenge abroad as there is already so much access and support provided on the U.S. campuses. And so particularly, when it comes to hidden disabilities, we really have a lot of materials in writing and also work closely with the disability services to encourage students to disclose so that we are able to determine what accommodations are available overseas... The sooner they do it [disclose], the better. We do request that they do it at least 8 weeks prior to the start of the program.

The other study abroad professionals mentioned disclosure when discussing their advising approach and accommodation arrangement. Most study abroad professionals indicated that students are not asked to disclose their disability until after they are accepted:

Johanna:

During advising appointments we let students decide to talk about what they want and if they want to disclose their disability then, they can... After they apply and are accepted, we have a medical form for them to fill out. That's where we ask students to request accommodations and list the medications they are on. They are not required to fill it out but we do mention that we can only accommodate if it is disclosed.

Jillian:

We ask students that they contact us as far in advance as possible so that we could begin discussing what types of accommodation they would require and what types we could provide. However, they aren't asked to disclose that till after they have been accepted into the program. We're doing it carefully to separate program acceptance and accommodation request so that students wouldn't feel that it would in any way jeopardize it or something because of course it wouldn't. But we know that that's a perception that students have.

Rebecca:

Students can't disclose their disability until after they are accepted. We can't begin this conversation until the student discloses – we have strict rules about that...

One study abroad professional indicated that during students' application for study abroad they are asked health related questions, like whether a student has a medical condition that a program coordinator should be aware of, or whether a student has any disability needs that might require accommodation:

Mary:

If a student answers "yes" to any of those questions, we go ahead and process their application. If they meet the eligibility criteria, based on their GPA, etc, we then accept them and then invite them to a meeting to ask follow-up questions based on their answers to see how we can help them... I just wanted to clarify that these questions don't determine whether they are accepted to the program or not because that would be illegal... So all of this is so that we can be proactive with logistics.

It appears that nondisclosure is common, especially among students with disabilities who have invisible disabilities. As one of the study abroad professionals, Anna, mentioned, "there are a lot of students with disabilities who you have no idea they have a disability because they don't disclose." Students with visible disabilities also often do not disclose their disabilities. This situation presented a challenge for a study abroad professional (Kelly) working in the overseas institution when she saw that the student that arrived used a wheelchair: "When this student arrived, I called her university's office

just to say: “What the hell you were thinking?! I hoped to use the off the record networking.” While in this case the study abroad adviser at that student’s home institution did not communicate to the study abroad staff in the host institution that a student had a disability that required accommodation, the study abroad professional (Anna) noted that if “someone has a physical disability... [she] would give the heads up to partners if students don’t disclose it.”

So why do students with disabilities choose not to disclose their disability? MIUSA identifies four main reasons why students choose not to disclose their disability (Disability Disclosure and Study Abroad: Understanding the Issues):

- *No need for accommodations:* students simply do not utilize resources on their U.S. campuses – about two-thirds of college students with disabilities do not utilize disability-related formal accommodations. They might not need to use academic accommodations, for example, while daily they might use rails going down stairs.
- *Fear that disclosure will lead to discrimination or rejection:* with a long history of people with disabilities being discriminated against throughout the world, students with disabilities may fear that their disclosure will lead to students’ discrimination or rejection. Fear of not being accepted is especially common for those with chronic mental or physical health issues. The fear of discrimination and rejection may also come from organizations’ and offices’ failure to create a welcoming and safe environment to disclose.
- *Identity:* individuals might not perceive themselves as having a disability. For example, someone with arthritis does not see oneself as having a disability and

therefore does not request accommodations, rather s/he might see this as a personal issue.

- *No one asks*: last but not least, students might not have been asked to disclose.

Questions about disability accommodation request may have been missing in pre-departure and post-acceptance materials.

The theory of social construction of disability can provide further understanding of why students with disabilities choose not to disclose their disability when applying to study abroad. As the social construction of disability considers those without disabilities in the analysis, attitudinal barriers can be the cause of the nondisclosure issue. As Nichols & Quaye observed, “research on campus climates reveals that people tend to hold negative attitudes, both conscious and unconscious, toward students with disabilities” (2009, p. 47). Kelly, Sedlacek, and Scales found that students without disabilities “developed stereotypical opinions of students with disabilities” (Nichols & Quaye, 2009, p. 47). Thus, students with disabilities might fear to disclose their disability because those around them might consciously or unconsciously develop negative attitudes towards them. For example, a student with mental health issues might fear that if s/he discloses her/his disability, attitudinal barriers might prevent her/him from being accepted to a program, especially if there is another applicant who also meets eligibility criteria but does not have mental health issues. In addition to that, because disability is also culturally constructed, students with disabilities may not be aware of the different disability culture since they have only lived in one cultural environment and therefore, they may not be aware that in another cultural setting certain accommodations and services which they do not necessarily request in the U.S. may not be available.

While nondisclosure is common for the reasons listed above, my findings reveal that it is as important to encourage disclosure in general as to encourage early disclosure to make sure that accommodations overseas can be made. Finding proper accommodations might take some time, therefore, it was advised by the participants that students disclose their disability early in the process. As one of the study abroad professionals (Kelly) who works in a host institution abroad mentions, “the most successful cases are when students apply 4-5 months in advance, particularly those who need physical accommodations and housing. In this city it’s like gold here.” However, it is not only those students who have physical disabilities that are encouraged to apply early. If a student, for example, has an Asperger’s syndrome, it might take quite some time to find the right host family, ideally the one that is sensitive and has knowledge of the Asperger’s syndrome.

As my findings suggest many study abroad professionals are concerned about students’ nondisclosure and while they try to encourage early disclosure, they also noted that they cannot ask students to disclose their disability before their acceptance to make sure they comply with the non-discrimination laws. What “early” means for some study abroad professionals may mean a different timeframe for others. For example, one professional (Susan) in this research encouraged disclosure at least 8 weeks before the start of the program, while Kelly who works in a university overseas mentioned that their most successful cases are when students applied and then disclosed their disability 4-5 months in advance. What these findings suggest is that Universal Design is not utilized by study abroad professionals. Because it might be hard to actually utilize the Universal Design in the foreign country where disability or certain types of it are viewed differently

or where there are historical buildings or buses, for example, without ramps, nondisclosure or late disclosure becomes a major concern for study abroad professionals.

Collaboration

Another emergent theme that has been revealed through the interviews with study abroad professionals is *Collaboration* which was considered important by all respondents in the process of including students with disabilities in study abroad. As Michael Schrage defines it, “collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own. Collaboration creates a shared meaning about a process, a product, or an event” (Denise, 2006).

Disability Services

All the respondents indicated that they collaborate closely with the disability services. In fact, for many study abroad professionals, disability services has been their biggest resource when it came to arranging study abroad for students with disabilities:

Mary:

...[recent experiences with students with disabilities] inquiring about study abroad... created an opportunity for us to strengthen our partnership with disability services.

Kelly:

I work closely with the Disability Services on campus [overseas] as it's not our study abroad office that handles it [accommodation requests].

Richard:

Well, on campus, of course we have an office for students with disabilities and I know the director quite well, so I work with her on as needed basis.

While all the participants indicated their collaboration with disability services, my

findings demonstrate that *how* they collaborate and use this resource is quite different. Some study abroad professionals work with the disability services only when the need arises, as Brittany (who is very supportive of students with disabilities studying abroad) noted, "...it's when somebody finally presents [a student with disability], then it would be "oh my God, what do I do here?!", and then they look for some resources." This represents a reactive approach to collaboration when the disability services are consulted with about a certain individual's situation and accommodation request. Others were able to use this resource fully and to become more proactive in the process of including students with disabilities in study abroad. For example, some study abroad professionals utilize disability services to reach out to and encourage students with disabilities to study abroad:

Mary:

We did a study abroad survey with the students registered with the disability services... those students at least know that there is a study abroad office and so we actually had students inquiring about study abroad from all different types of disability...Also they [the disability services] were really good at letting us know "oh, we have a student interested in studying abroad," and so they would also copy us on the email so that the student doesn't fall through the cracks.

Johanna:

We train their [disability services'] counselors about study abroad so that then they can give those messages to students. We also go to the disability staff meetings once a year and do a presentation there.

Rebecca:

...the more we work with the disability services, the more those professionals can encourage students with disabilities to go abroad...

Susan:

We work closely with the disability services so that then they can encourage students to study abroad...

Anna:

...I plan to set up and do advising at the disability services [as a way to reach out to diverse populations]... There is also a link to the study abroad website on the disability services website...

These findings show that the role of disability services provider can be significant in increasing the numbers of and encouraging students with disabilities studying abroad. Since disability services staff are the ones who often work closely with students, through collaboration with disability services, study abroad professionals can reach out to students with disabilities. These results suggest that the role of disability services staff in the above examples has been not only to “handle all disability-related issues, such as locating accessible housing, transportation, or adaptive equipment...ensur[ing] access to programs and services, such as student organizations, academic majors, internships, and study abroad” (p. 94) as suggested in their study by Hameister, Mattews, Hosley, and Groff, but also serve as liaisons between study abroad professionals and students with disabilities (1999). Hamesiter et al also noted that “a willingness to commit the time is often the biggest barrier” (p. 94) for both disability services and study abroad offices (1999). These findings suggest that collaboration with disability services staff can potentially somewhat “save” time and other resources for study abroad professionals if disability services staff, when talking to students, can encourage them to consider studying abroad. In addition to that, targeting students with disabilities specifically may look like students are singled out while they may not want to have an informational session created only for them or they may not want to identify as having a disability. As Brittany reflected on her organization’s experience, “...what worked well for students with disabilities was that they didn’t want to come to the meeting that said “Come and

learn about students with disabilities and study abroad” because not all of them wanted to be identified as such. So we worked with the disability services to send a letter to the students, signed by the director of study abroad, to let them know that study abroad was an option for them, and encouraged them to meet with us confidentially... And we had a great response!”

Besides serving as a “liaison” between students with disabilities and study abroad staff, disability services’ role is also “offering professional development programs to other university offices about disability issues” (Hameister, Matthews, Hosley, & Groff, 1999, p. 94). Only two study abroad professionals indicated that they collaborated with disability services to receive training on how to work with students with disabilities:

Susan:

We did cross-training with our disability services office, so those staff came, and met with us, and shared with us their approach to working with students with disabilities and we also trained on the considerations to keep in mind that are unique to study abroad.

Anna:

When I first started my job, I asked the disability services office to come and chat because not everyone was comfortable [with working with students with disabilities].

Anna indicated that her colleagues had little or no knowledge at all about this student population and therefore felt uncomfortable working with them. Lack of knowledge of this population and an uncomfortable feeling due to this is common not only between study abroad professionals but also in higher education in general. As Nichols and Quayle state, “these students are often overlooked in comparison to other student populations... [and] are sometimes thought of as a ‘forgotten minority’ of student affairs practice in higher education” (2009, p. 39). Since disabilities and their impact are

hardly ever openly discussed, consequently “the needs of these students are largely ignored and rarely met by college and university officials, administrators, and faculty” (Nichols & Quaye, 2009, p. 39). While two study abroad professionals indicated that their institution’s disability services’ role extended to providing some sort of training to their study abroad staff, it is clear that this important role of disability services is not widely used by other study abroad professionals. As Brittany observed, “the information, the resources are out there, study abroad don’t know how to use them effectively and they don’t have the confidence to do this.”

Other Contributors

Hameister et al point out that “academic advisers, on-site coordinators, students, parents, and financial aid staff are all important contributors to the process” (1999, p. 89). Though most study abroad professionals in this study spoke about disability services as one of the main contributors to the collaboration process, other contributors were mentioned as well by some participants. These contributors include family, program providers, host university, host family, off-campus organizations, and faculty:

Kelly:

Parents are the key.... But to what degree are they involved? Some are very involved and it could either be a great support for students or it could hold them back.

Johanna:

[in one of her experiences with a student with disability] ...there was a lot of exchange of information between the student, program provider, university, host family, and the student’s family – to make sure she [the student] could study abroad and that we’re all on the same page.

Richard:

... it might involve the academics dean if certain issues are involved depending on accommodations but for the most part it would be the office for students with disabilities. Off-campus, we work obviously with providers abroad whether it's a university or a third-party provider, we have done that in the past. We work with them closely. And we try to point students in the right direction in terms of obtaining outside funding for needs that they might have, such as Mobility International or other resources.

Anna:

... I've worked with different faculty members with faculty-led programs, who might have had concerns about students with disabilities going on their program...

While faculty was not listed in Hameister's et al work as important contributors to the process, my interview with one faculty member who does faculty-led programs suggests that it is important to consider faculty as one of the important contributors:

Danielle:

I'm checking out the possibility of including students with disabilities on my short term study abroad trip... I've been approached by a few students who use wheelchairs here at home who are interested in the trip. [During my upcoming study abroad trip], I'll be checking out improved venues... to see if I can find affordable housing and activities in accessible places, and find a volunteer work venue with children that is both accessible, and in which my students would be welcomed. I've met with our campus center supporting students with disabilities to be sure I'm aware of all that I should be thinking of, and to be sure I have support, and all seems positive thus far.

As we can see from the above quotes, there are often a lot of collaborators involved in the process. With so many contributors involved, Johanna observed the challenges it can present:

Johanna:

The challenge is making sure that everyone is on the same page – family, program provider, disability services, and that everyone knows what to expect.

The faculty member who participated in this study also mentioned that it took a little while for everyone (study abroad director, her, and disability services staff) to be on

the same page even if all the individuals involved were very supportive of Danielle's initiative to make her program more inclusive.

Training or Lack of It

The third theme identified through the interviews with study abroad professionals focused on the training they received or did not receive, whether this training was formal or informal, proactive vs. reactive, and what it entailed.

In response to my question whether study abroad professionals received any formal or informal training on working with students with disabilities through their institutions, most participants indicated that they did not receive any formal training:

Kelly:

Nobody had any special training...

Johanna:

Not formal training – just attended several conferences... It is the topic that interests me – diversity in general interests me.

Jillian:

We don't have any formal training, no. I wish we did. It's something that we have open conversations about. We get a lot of mentoring from the [X] office of study abroad because they do have a staff member who... that's her area of focus. They have a much larger staff so they have people who are able to focus on different areas of study abroad. So that's a wonderful resource that we have access to. So no, no formal training...

Nichols and Quaye point out that “there is a lack of knowledge about who these students are and about their unique needs, interests, and skills,... periodic sessions throughout the academic year in which faculty and student affairs educators can converse about students with disabilities... will be vital to awareness and understanding” (2009, p.55). Most of respondents indicated that none of such formal training has been provided

by their institutions. Three study abroad professionals indicated that they did receive training from their institutions on how to work with students with disabilities. For instance, Susan indicated that they conduct trainings where “[they] did cross-training with [their] disability services office, so those staff came, and met with [them], and shared with [them] their approach to working with students with disabilities and [study abroad staff] also trained [them] on the considerations to keep in mind that are unique to study abroad.” Anna noted that while this training has been provided, she initiated it by inviting the disability services staff to come in to talk about students with disabilities and their needs as not everyone in her study abroad office was comfortable working with students with disabilities. Her motivation for organizing this training came from her background as a social worker and her experience and familiarity with the population. The third study abroad professional who spoke of the formal training was Victoria who works on-site. She said that the program provider that she works for conducts formal trainings every now and then. However, she also noted that while these trainings are provided, “there is room for more ... and more specific training would be good.”

Since formal trainings are rarely provided by institutions, for getting “most of the training – they have to go out to get it,” observes Brittany. Some study abroad professionals recalled that they received some training by attending various conferences, such as NAFSA conferences which offer a number of workshops and sessions that cover a variety of topics related to international education:

Johanna:

Not formal training – I just attended several conferences. It is the topic that interests me – diversity in general interests me. I went to sessions that addressed that topic.

Richard:

I do remember attending a NAFSA workshop some years ago and the rest I basically do on my own.

Rebecca:

Training is offered by the area study abroad professionals at the regional conferences, like NAFSA, so when we can, we attend those.

In general, it appeared as if those who have received significant training were those study abroad professionals who were somehow more invested and motivated for various reasons in taking proactive steps in supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad. For instance, Johanna mentioned that she attended several sessions at conferences that addressed that topic because the topic of diversity in general interests her and because she believes that “everyone should have access to go to places” – she wants all types of students to go abroad and not just the white females. Anna, as mentioned earlier, was a social worker before she pursued her career in international education, so not only she invited the disability services staff to come to talk to her study abroad office when she first started her new job, she also trains her colleagues on how to support students with disabilities. Brittany not only attended sessions that focus on this topic but she also presented at several professional conferences. Her commitment to students’ with disability inclusion to study abroad comes from her personal experience of having people with disabilities in her life, as well as her academic experience in focusing on rehabilitation.

Besides attending sessions on disability topics at different conferences, informal training also entailed study abroad professionals’ usage of various resources available to them. For example, Brittany, Johanna, and Victoria mentioned that MIUSA’s publications are a great resource for study abroad professionals. Victoria also brought to

light an important point that while there is probably a lot of information out there, “a lot of us are re-inventing the wheel – we should somehow share it better... even through SECUSSA, maybe through subgroups on medical and social aspects of a certain disability.”

Cost & Funding

The fourth theme, *Cost & Funding*, was identified through my question about study abroad professionals’ current challenges. One of the challenges discussed by a few respondents was that one of funding and cost. According to the literature discussed in Chapter III (Johnson, 2000), the survey conducted with study abroad and disability services staff revealed that one of the concerns that these professionals had was finding funds to assist students in meeting the extra costs associated with studying abroad with a disability. In my study, Jillian reported that funding can be an issue as her organization does not have resources to provide funding so a student will be responsible for it:

Jillian:

Probably one of the biggest challenges in my mind is funding – some accommodations can become quite expensive and unfortunately our organization doesn’t have a lot of additional funding that we can provide so we often consistently take the coordination of accommodation but the student is asked to provide the funding. If only I wish we could do more but at this time that’s something the student generally is going to be responsible for.

Johanna also stated that the cost can be a challenge. While in her experience working with students with disabilities this has not been an issue yet, she anticipates that it can be if a student does not have means to pay for those extra expenses:

Johanna:

Money can be a challenge. This [past] student’s family paid for her. But I can anticipate the cost challenge for other students...

While finding funds for covering extra costs for a student with disability overseas can be challenging, Brittany argues that it is also a perception out there that study abroad professionals have. She points out that the “the majority of students have learning disability, it’s not the expectation that you take a historic building in a European country and expect to re-do it.”

The fourth respondent, Richard, did not state funding and cost as a challenge but when I asked him whether he had experienced any institutional obstacles, he reported that while funding issue itself was not a challenging issue and he agreed with the university’s decision not to pay for the extra cost associated with providing accommodation to a student overseas, it is the post-funding decision process that seems to be challenging to handle for him:

Richard:

Basically, I feel I am under the obligation to treat the student essentially as any other student, even if we don’t accommodate [him]...because we don’t have the resources to pay for it, I still should be able to help the student find other resources and basically treat him like any other student. And the [university] lawyer is very concerned about setting precedence and basically appearing to accommodate the student, and thereby, creating some sort of a legal obligation to accommodate the student further and openly having him pay for that, for the services.

This discussion ties back to the literature review provided in Chapter III where I discussed legal issues in study abroad. While the literature displayed a complex discussion regarding whether the laws extend to extraterritoriality, this example brings more complexity into the discussion of legal issues in study abroad by not only determining whether accommodations can be paid for but also by posing a question whether the university will be responsible for paying for a student if Richard continues to work with him on finding other resources.

Diversity Increase in Study Abroad as Motivator

The fifth theme identified through the interviews with study abroad professionals focuses on how the general focus on and interest in diversity and diverse students' access to study abroad influences current practices of inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad. Many study abroad professionals interviewed in this study spoke of their current work with students with disabilities in the context of diversity in general. Some study abroad professionals pointed out that diversity increase on their campuses is becoming their "new thing" (Rebecca). Thus, study abroad professionals' current practices and efforts are influenced by the idea of bringing diverse populations to study abroad, and students with disabilities is one out of many student populations that they reach out to. This suggests that study abroad professionals interviewed in this study do not overlook students with disabilities in comparison to other diverse student populations. While Nichols and Quaye's argument that students with disability are "a forgotten minority of student affairs practice in higher education" (p. 39) holds true for many campuses and departments, this study suggests that students with disabilities were considered a minority group and were considered as one of the student populations to be reached out to if diversity increase in study abroad goal was in place.

Mary, for instance, reported how internationalization of higher education prompted her office to reach out to diverse populations, including students with disabilities. She discussed how some departments at her institution require students to study abroad and therefore, her office is interested in increasing the diversity of students studying abroad. Mary mentioned that within their office, they started to do a lot of diversity outreach and creating partnerships. For example, she can now contact the

disability services office so that they can walk her through what to consider when working with a student with disability.

Rebecca, too, cited that diversity has taken a lot of steps not just with students with disabilities, but also with students of color. She called it the “new thing for their school.” While she mentioned that they do not have any time or resources for actively recruiting minority students, she pointed out that any kind of discrimination abroad can be addressed in the pamphlet, where information on LGBT/ race/ disability can be mentioned and resources for these different groups of students can be highlighted.

Susan’s outreach to students with disabilities began when she has been doing some outreach work to nontraditional students.

Brittany, for instance, reported that diversity is a priority for her organization and they make sure to mention it on their website, as well as emphasize that disability is diversity. She reflected that they want diverse students to take part in study abroad and therefore, they make efforts to send this message to students:

Brittany:

We hire interns in the office who are willing to share their stories of success, for example, of studying abroad having disability. Diversity is very important to our organization. We have LGBT interns, for example, as well. We think it’s important for students to see students like themselves, to have role-models who already have gone abroad. Diversity has to be presented in photographs; through scholarships; and it has to be explicitly talked about.

Johanna reflected that her main reason for attending conference sessions which addressed the topic of students with disabilities and study abroad was due to her general interest in diversity. She stated that everyone should have an access to go to places and her desire is to make sure that all types of students go abroad, not just white females.

While the above examples highlight that diversity increase in study abroad goal often serves as a motivator for reaching out to students with disabilities, the example below suggests that if there is no such goal of bringing diversity in study abroad, there are also no efforts made for actively reaching out to students with disabilities:

Richard:

It's something that I need to learn more about and want to learn about but I just don't have the resources to create a lot of extra work for myself, quite frankly. But frankly, some disabilities are very easy to deal with, right?!... and easy to accommodate and wouldn't take any extra time than others, so I don't want to give you the impression that I'm hostile to disability, you know. But there are a lot of special efforts that we don't make. We don't make any special efforts to recruit, let's say minority students, we don't make any special efforts to recruit, let's say, science students and the underrepresented groups. I just don't have the resources to do that.

When diversity increase in study abroad serves as a motivator for inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad, it appears that then study abroad professionals tend to incorporate concepts of Universal Design in the study abroad context. For instance, when Brittany spoke of her office's practice of hiring interns with disabilities, she also mentioned that they hire LGBT students as well. This reflects the practice of incorporating concepts of Universal Design in the Policy/Programmatic Environment because students with disabilities are not hired just to support other students with disabilities; rather, they are hired to support any students interested in studying abroad. By hiring diverse interns, Brittany's office reaches out to diverse groups and not just to students with disabilities.

Tailored Outreach

Another emergent theme in this study focuses on the variety of ways study abroad

professionals tailored their outreach efforts to recruit more students with disabilities in study abroad. Most study abroad professionals reported that they try to make special efforts to reach out to this population. As it was mentioned earlier under the *collaboration* theme, many study abroad professionals used their partnership with disability services to reach out to students with disabilities. For instance, Mary reported that her office distributed a survey to the students registered with the disability services office. While this survey was targeting all student populations, their effort was to engage students with disabilities in thinking about going abroad and in fact, Mary noted that after this survey they actually had students with disabilities inquire about study abroad.

Brittany's method using the tailored approach paralleled Mary's in the sense that her office also worked with the disability services to send a message to students with disabilities that study abroad options are available to them. While Mary sent out general surveys to these students, Brittany reported that they specifically invited students to come in to talk with their staff about study abroad options:

Brittany:

"...what worked well for students with disabilities was that they didn't want to come to the meeting that said "Come and learn about students with disabilities and study abroad" because not all of them wanted to be identified as such. So we worked with the disability services to send a letter to the students, signed by the director of study abroad, to let them know that study abroad was an option for them, and encouraged them to meet with us confidentially... And we had a great response!"

Another method frequently cited which was used to reach out to students with disabilities was through websites, written materials, and other promotional materials:

Jillian:

And on our website we have some information on students with disabilities in our pre-departure information, in which we talk about the process of requesting accommodation. We're hoping to make that information more prominent in the future but we hope that this at least provides a welcoming tone on the website and creates awareness that we have at least something in place.

In our literature in our program information we visually are trying to demonstrate that we have a very diverse population so I hope that that sends a strong message that we are here for all students...

Anna:

We are currently redoing our website to make it more marketable to diverse populations... It's a really good revenue to reach out to students... We also have a link to our study abroad website on the disability services website.

Brittany:

You need to make it very clear that these are the students that are welcomed to your program... It has to be presented in photographs and through scholarships. Diversity has to be explicitly talked about.

Some methods of reaching out to students with disabilities reported in this study did not necessarily include creating specific materials for these students per se or utilizing disability services with a purpose to email/send a letter to these students. Instead, study abroad staff used disability services as liaisons between students with disabilities and themselves. Since in many cases, one-on-one interaction might be even more effective than promotional materials, a couple of study abroad professionals reported that they work closely with disability services staff so that they can encourage students with disabilities to study abroad since they are the ones that interact with these students more often:

Johanna:

We train their [disability services?] counselors about study abroad so that then they can give those messages to students. We also go to the disability staff meetings once a year and do a presentation there.

Susan:

We work closely with the disability services so that they can encourage students to study abroad...

Two study abroad professionals listed below demonstrate innovative ways of reaching out to students with disabilities:

Anna:

...I plan to set up and do advising at the disability services [as a way to reach out to diverse populations]... There is also a link to the study abroad website on the disability services website...

Brittany:

We hire interns in the office who are willing to share their stories of success, for example, of studying abroad having disability. Diversity is very important to our organization. We have LGBT interns, for example, as well. We think it's important for students to see students like themselves, to have role-models who already have gone abroad. Diversity has to be presented in photographs; through scholarships; and it has to be explicitly talked about.

While establishing scholarships might be impossible for some institutions due to the lack of financial resources, hiring students with disabilities as interns, peer assistants, or volunteers, as well as setting up advising at disability services seem to be effective methods to encourage students with disabilities to study abroad. "Inviting students with disabilities who have studied abroad to speak at disability and education abroad advising and information sessions can help potential applicants anticipate the experience they may have and feel empowered to share their disability needs," notes Soneson (2009, p. 6). It is surprising that only one study abroad professional mentioned students with disabilities who have already come back from abroad as potential liaisons between study abroad staff and students with disabilities.

Perceived Benefits

The seventh theme identified through the interviews with study abroad professionals focuses on how they perceived the benefits of inclusion of students with

disabilities in study abroad. This theme includes the instances of how the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad benefits others, what benefits it offers for students with disabilities themselves and for the collaborators involved in the process.

Overall, study abroad professionals reported the perceived benefits for students with disabilities themselves. Some respondents noted that the benefits of studying abroad for students with disabilities were the same or almost the same as for any other students:

Kelly:

Same benefits for all students – to be outside your country. It's not more beneficial for students with disabilities it's just different goals...

Richard:

I suppose it could potentially be very satisfying to a student to have overcome some obstacles that he or she may not have been used to before. Let's say the student is here and is basically being accommodated, he or she gets along fine, and then going abroad is not so easy and everybody has to make special efforts and then if it works quite well, then it's very satisfying to the student...

Beyond that, it's the same for a disabled student as for any other student – you go abroad and you learn the things, you learn things about yourself and about the foreign culture, I don't see much of a difference there.

Susan:

The same benefits - ability to understand another culture, different perspective. In some cases, it is an opportunity for students to understand how disability is approached in different country.

Other study abroad professionals reflected on additional benefits gained by students with disabilities, including boosting their confidence and self-esteem. For instance, Johanna recalled that a student she worked with who had the Asperger's syndrome mentioned how her study abroad experience was the best thing she did during her college career. Johanna observed that one of the main benefits for students with disabilities includes boosting their confidence: "they know they can do it, I did it, I can do anything."

Brittany also mentioned that the study abroad experience is very beneficial for students with disabilities as they gain “a sense of confidence, their own self-image, self-advocacy, and self-efficiency.” Further, she states that based on their debriefings with students with disabilities who have come back from study abroad, she argues that “students with disabilities gain tremendously more than the students who don’t have a disability” as they come back with a greater sense of achievement.

Besides the perceived benefits for students with disabilities themselves, a few study abroad professionals recognized the benefits the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad offers to others, including their peers, the local community, and everyone else involved in the process. For instance, Jillian and Victoria spoke about the benefits it offers to their peers who have been on the same program with these students:

Jillian:

It’s also very rewarding to see our other students having the experience studying with... particularly with the wheelchair users which is a very visible disability and for other students to see how strong that student is and how able they are. For many of our students they had never had a class with someone with a physical disability before and so I think that was very opinion-changing or eye-opening experience for them. So that was a very nice thing to see.

Victoria:

It was unbelievably rewarding to have [students with disabilities] on the program. Diversity is really satisfying – there were different kinds of discover, discussion, and humor... The important message is that including people with disabilities is not only good for people with disabilities, it’s good for everybody. For example, the hearing people, [through their interaction with a deaf student on the program], they just realized the whole new side of the [X country] society - the deaf community. It’s another side they wouldn’t have learned about. It is profoundly enriching.

In addition to benefiting other students on the program, Mary, for example, mentioned how the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad also benefited

the community. She noted that students' abroad experience brought awareness to the local community about accessibility. For instance, the captain on a boat that a student with disability was on, mentioned that after encountering this student, even though this student wasn't using a wheelchair but had a different type of disability, he began thinking of making the boat wheelchair accessible. Susan paralleled to Mary's response, mentioning that the inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad provides a "wonderful growth process for everyone... to learn the diversity."

Preconceptions and Misconceptions about Disability

While the eighth and ninth themes were identified as important, they were mentioned by fewer people. However, the information these themes provide is significant. The eighth theme identified through the interviews with study abroad professionals focuses on their preconceptions and misconceptions about disability.

Two study abroad professionals indicated the challenge associated with the clash of their personal beliefs and perceived reality:

Rebecca:

It is challenging to help students understand you're on their side but also you want to make sure they are safe and OK.

Victoria:

One of the challenges is that [X city] is not a very accessible place. It's hard to be encouraging students with disabilities, especially those with wheelchairs, even if you'd like it to happen. My personal values are to make it work but I can't mislead them. [X city] is not accessible. The reality is it's better for students in other cities in [X country].

The above examples show the genuine interest in supporting students with disabilities but there is a voice of concern about their well-being abroad. These quotes

demonstrate that while these study abroad professionals want to help students with disabilities they might be putting their own beliefs and assumptions on students with disabilities, thus constructing the notion of “disability.” For example, Emily, one of the interviewed students who uses a wheelchair, mentioned how able-bodied she was and though she used a wheelchair, she could ride an escalator in it, for example. While Rebecca and Victoria are not aware of these possible assumptions, Jillian is aware of them and noted that one of the challenges for her is not to make those assumptions but rather provide information to students and let them decide:

Jillian:

... I wouldn't say that it's the biggest challenge but I think an important challenge for me to understand has been not to put any assumptions on a student, not to assume that they can or can't do any particular thing but to provide them with information and let them decide as they know themselves best. And it's not difficult for us to do but it's something I definitely have to consciously make sure I am doing.

While Anna herself does not find it challenging, she noted that her colleagues sometimes get really worried if a student is interested in going to the place where accommodations are not as available. Just like Jillian, she just provides information and lets them make an informed decision. She noted that this is the same thing as when an African American, for instance, comes in to talk to them and expresses his interest in going to Russia. Instead of worrying for the student, she would need to discuss with him some stereotypes and society's perspective on race. She highlights the importance of providing as much information as possible and for study abroad professionals to be self-aware - not to be anxious, not to be overly protective, and constantly check themselves to determine whether it is related to the student or to their own stuff.

Kelly's constructed beliefs and views on disability influence how she perceives the reality. In the example below, Kelly states that a student "had to manage her issues if she wanted to participate." This statement reflects her belief that it is an individual's problem and that a student will be ruining other students' experience if she did not use a wheelchair:

The student couldn't speak very well... For the field trip I mentioned that she would need to use a wheelchair, but her parents kept telling me, "it's fine, it's fine"... When dealing with students with disabilities... equally the other students have the right to have the study abroad experience that they wanted and in this case she had to use a wheelchair so that she didn't hold up the group. If she wanted to participate, she had to manage her issues.

The quote above suggests that Kelly views disability as residing within the individual and thus, this individual needs to "manage her issues." It is clear that this student cannot keep up with society's expectations. Because the host site fails to accommodate the student in that cross-cultural setting the student is viewed as holding up a group if she does not use a wheelchair.

Richard's quote below suggests that his perceptions and beliefs about disability are reflected in how he perceives the reality of working with a student who has one type of disability vs. another type:

Again, if it's a serious disability, if it's a major disability, I should say, then of course it could be a cost issue, so that's handled on case-by-case basis.

How did Richard determine what a serious disability is? Richard's quote reflects how society perceives disability and what attitudes it has towards one type of disability vs. another.

Students with Disabilities and their Peers without Disabilities

Kelly reported that students' with disabilities interaction with peers, when abroad, presents some challenges:

The other thing that I find challenging is the relationship with their peers. Because other students might feel guilty... But should they feel guilty if they don't take someone who doesn't communicate well, for example to the pub to communicate socially? You don't want to take somebody along who you have to look after, and that's OK. Having a disability doesn't make you a saint, doesn't make you special. I think in America we grow up with the idea that everybody is equal and that everyone can do anything, but no, we can't. It doesn't mean that everybody can't have access to the same experience but it it's not going to be the same. We'll help you but you don't automatically have special compensation. It's challenging when there is a roommate and you have to say "you don't have to do another person's shopping, that's what the personal aid is for, that's not what your job is."

The quote above represents the notion of disability as a social construct. Her answer suggests that it is an individual's problem. Her comments reflect the idea that being disabled is negative and that an individual with disability needs to be looked after. While in these interviews with study abroad professionals I did not specifically ask about students with disabilities and their interactions with peers without disabilities overseas, some professionals reflected that overall there was observed positive interaction between them.

CHAPTER VI

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Fives themes emerged from the interviews with students with disabilities. These themes bring to light students' experiences arranging their study abroad as well as reflect their thoughts on current practices and provide insights into perceived influences of study abroad on students with disabilities. These five themes (listed in no particular order of significance) are:

- The Impact of Study Abroad
- Perceived Factors Preventing Students with Disabilities from Studying Abroad
- Confronting Doubts
- Tailored Approach
- Study Abroad Professionals Dealing with Students with Disabilities for the First Time

The Impact of Study Abroad

The results of the interviews with students with disabilities suggested that study abroad experience has profoundly impacted them and their identity development. The data is consistent with the Chickering's theory of student development.

Developing Competence

The interviews with students with disabilities showed that students developed intellectual competence. The participants demonstrated an increase in their intellectual development through improving their foreign language skills as well as through gaining a better understanding of the country and its culture:

Emily:

When I was in [X country], I travelled a lot by myself [in X country] so there were many times when I needed help or something wasn't accessible, I would have to use [X language] to figure out how to do things so I had to speak [X language] really well with people and explain my situation.

Michelle:

I would have to say that the most rewarding part of it was the experience itself because I got the chance to speak [X language] and it was rewarding for me because I love studying the language, and the same with another [X language], even though I could only speak a few words but I was still able to enhance my knowledge of the language while I was in [X country]...And I think the overall reward was the chance to experience the cultures first hand and what it really had to give you. I mean... when we think of Muslims, we think of 9/11, Osama Bin Laden, the terrorist, but when you go there and live with a host family, it's just a different side altogether.

Laura:

I learned a lot about the disability culture there.

Managing Emotions

When students study abroad, they often experience lots of different emotions and are more likely to find themselves frustrated about certain things or homesick due to culture shock, especially in the first weeks of their study abroad experience. Therefore, they are very likely to have to work through this vector. Laura, for example, mentioned that her living situation caused certain emotions to surface. She said that she participated in a faculty-led program and lived with a group of her peers in the same house. She often found it frustrating to live in a big group as a hearing impaired person because even if she mentioned her disability to her peers at the beginning of the program, when in a big group, they would often talk about different gossip and she would be left out from the conversation because they would not face her so she would not be able to lip read. She mentioned that though it was frustrating at times that they did not take her disability into

consideration, she had to learn how to manage her emotions – when to be more flexible and when to express her frustration.

Michelle also mentioned her frustration which was linked to her trying to get into a taxi with a wheelchair in [X country] but encountering a taxi driver who was unwilling to try to fit it into the car. She mentioned that “that was a real pain... and wasn’t very easy to handle.” While various situations abroad might cause many study abroad participants to experience a range of emotions, students with disabilities might experience even more frustrating and challenging moments and would probably also learn even more how to recognize and accept these emotions, as well as how to appropriately express and control them.

Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence

The interviews demonstrate that some students with disabilities did work through this vector of moving through autonomy toward interdependence. For example, Laura demonstrated how she gained emotional independence by overcoming the fear of not being accepted by the foreign culture when she decided to pursue her study abroad experience. She recalls that she always wanted to study abroad but was always nervous about it because she is hearing impaired and was afraid of how the foreign culture would regard her. As a hard of hearing person, she was aware that “...perceptions in developing countries are not positive. Old cultural beliefs clash with modern beliefs. For example, disability is regarded as punishment from the God. In India a deaf person is considered to be a thief in the previous life.” Though she knew that she might be perceived not in a positive way in a developing country, she pursued her study abroad program in a developing country.

One of the criticisms of Chickering's theory is that he did not take into account diverse populations and mainly considered the traditional student body. While age, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture were acknowledged as influencing identity development, disability was not mentioned in that list. Therefore, in the example below, I try to apply Chickering's notion of "instrumental independence" to students with disabilities. Though the example below might seem to contradict Chickering's idea of "instrumental independence" which "involves learning to get from one place to another, without having to be taken by the hand or given detailed directions, and to find the information or resources required to fulfill personal needs and desires," I believe it actually demonstrates a gained "instrumental independence" as this student was able to fulfill personal needs and desires" through new gained "problem-solving" skills (Chickering):

Emily:

...the other thing that I learned, that yeah, sometimes things are accessible in a way that I have never imagined – to be in a country where people are willing to carry you, no one ever measured it as a form of accessibility. Well, yeah, I guess if you are in a country where people are nice and very helpful, then you are good to go. Nobody [in the U.S.] sees it that way, they only see it in terms of ramps and elevator. But for me being able to talk to people and everyone in [X country] was really helpful, even when they recognized I am a foreigner, they would be, hey, are you lost? And that's the type of accessibility I have never thought of before.

While literally the student was actually helped – was carried, at times, she actually gained self-sufficiency by finding a new form of accessibility.

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

Three students with disabilities demonstrated the development of more mature interpersonal and intercultural relationships. The development of this vector is probably the one most likely to be observed the most in students who have returned from study

abroad experiences, though of course there might be exceptions for this. Typically, study abroad returnees often display great tolerance towards other cultures after living abroad. Though some stereotypes can be reinforced, students often start to recognize the stereotypes, respect differences, and appreciate commonalities. Emily, for example, reflected on the different disability culture in [X country] but in her statement, she displayed tolerance and understanding towards the [X country] view of disability and her perception of the [X country] culture in that regard:

Emily:

When I was in [X country], I probably saw three people with disabilities. Most people with disabilities stay at home, they don't really leave their house or travel or do anything, so most people were very helpful but also shocked – “wow, are you sure you can do this?” They have just never interacted with someone in a wheelchair before. I learnt their customs and how to ask people politely... the more I travel, the more I see that people are very open to people with disabilities. It might take a while for people to get used to it, but then they come around it and they will be extremely helpful. And it's comforting to travel to some parts of the world where people will help me or that they are just as helpful as they are here.

For Michelle, study abroad experience helped her to “refine first impressions, reduce bias and ethnocentrism, increase empathy... and enjoy diversity” (Chickering). Referring to the stereotypes and perceptions about Muslims, she notes:

Michelle:

...when I went there [X country], I thought it was absolutely untrue because my host family was very nice, very kind, very easy to get along with, and they were hospitable.

While Laura noted that she would have to stop signing in public because she received strange looks from the local people when she studied abroad in a developing country, her response indicates tolerance and understanding of their reactions:

Laura:

I don't think they recognized it was a language. I think they could hear from my speech and combined with the hand movement, I don't know what was going on with me, they avoided me after that. They probably have never seen a deaf person who could talk.

Establishing Identity, the fifth vector, is centered on developing a secure sense of self, self-acceptance, and self-esteem, being comfortable with one's gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation. Again, while disability is not explicitly stated in Chickering's work, I am applying Chickering's theory to students with disabilities by observing the development of self-esteem in students with disabilities due to their study abroad experiences. The current participants noted the following changes in their identity development:

Rita:

I came back with a lot of confidence in myself and with a lot of leadership skills... Study abroad allows students to realize that they don't need to be defined by their challenges. It allows them to see beyond their circumstances which is really empowering.

Laura:

[As she advises other students with disabilities]... Also realize that you might have to depend on some people more than you would do here [in the U.S.]. I got out much more out of the experience because of that even if I'm an independent person.

Emily:

It's comforting to travel to some parts of the world where people will help me or that they are just as helpful as they are here. I think it's a really eye-opening perspective that makes me realize I'm not only limited to the place where I was born.

As seen in the quotes above, students with disabilities who studied abroad came back with a great sense of themselves, increase in their self-esteem, and became more comfortable with who they are.

Developing Purpose

After their study abroad experiences, students indicated their development of purpose. While for some students, vocational goals remained unclear after their international experiences, they established commitment to personal interests and activities as well to academics:

Michelle:

My love for travel has doubled after this trip. And the first time I went to [X country], I said, yes, I want to study a major in [X language] because that's what I want to do.

Rita:

These [past travel] experiences gave me the confidence to study abroad so I applied for the international studies major.

Laura:

It inspired her to look into development and empowering people with disabilities...

Developing Integrity

Emily's experience provides a good example of how a student could develop integrity while examining integrity issues through her voyage to [X country] in which she discovered a new route to accessibility – being carried – so she moves away from a value system dictated by her home country. She begins to establish and expand her personal value system – feeling comfortable being carried when needed. The developing congruence stage comes when she does not say that all the students with disabilities are comfortable with being carried but rather she suggests that study abroad professionals ask students what they need rather than making any assumptions about their needs:

Emily:

I think that they should ask you first. They should come up with these different scenarios and they should ask how would you do in this scenario? Let's say you're at a house with stairs, how would you get out of the house with stairs? So basically asking more questions instead of being like oh, this house has stairs, and here is what we're going to do for you. And you are like, wait a minute, I have my own methods of making things accessible because I have been in a wheelchair for twelve years so there are things I know that professionals don't know.

While Chickering's theory did not take students with disabilities into account, it is clear from my findings that study abroad contributed tremendously to students' development. The data suggests to me that students with disabilities were more likely to work through all seven vectors while studying abroad, maybe even more so than their peers without disabilities in certain situations. For example, Emily, that with her disability, it was

Emily:

Oh, I loved it because like when I was talking to my teacher's wife, she is an [X language] teacher, she said you know what, it's almost really cool that you have a disability and will study abroad because you will learn the language way faster than your friends and that's what happened.

It is evident that students' study abroad experience played a great role in developing the students' identity. As Chickering's theory is widely used in student affairs as it suggests program priorities and strategies to foster students' development by creating opportunities for students to develop in the seven vectors, it is important to note that study abroad might be a successful way for students with disabilities to grow and enhance all the seven vectors.

Perceived Factors Preventing Students with Disabilities to Study Abroad

Another emergent theme identified through the interviews with students contains

instances of what prevents students with disabilities from studying abroad. While a few study abroad professionals also discussed some factors preventing students with disabilities from studying abroad, not all study abroad professionals were asked this question, and when not asked, the topic did not surface during the conversation. Students' responses, however, do not simply reflect their perceived ideas of why students do not study abroad, but they often reflected their own experiences or experiences of their friends. The data suggests that the perceived factors preventing students with disabilities from studying abroad are: cultural concerns, parents' concern about safety, lack of marketing, and mobility concerns.

Two students, Michelle and Laura, noted that cultural concerns often prevent students from deciding to study abroad. While Michelle did not mention that she herself had those concerns, Laura reflected on how she initially feared applying to study abroad because she did not know how another culture would perceive her:

Michelle:

I think they might be concerned about how they might be looked at, or how they might be perceived by other culture which is not an American culture. We don't know how we are going to be treated in a country like say France, Italy, or Germany, or Spain. Because again their cultures are quite different from our cultures. They might not know where they are at about handicapped people.

Laura:

I was afraid of how the local culture is going to look at me, how people would perceive me...

Emily noted that, based on her experience, it is "other people" that can influence her decision of not going abroad:

When I think about a place where I want to travel to, I think about what I have heard from other people. I wouldn't probably go somewhere like South America because people say that it's really really inaccessible. And there are no paved roads. It's mainly people talking that prevent me from going, all the things that I have heard.

She reflected on how often times she found other people's advice to be "wrong" once she would get to these places. She stated that she "can't trust other people's advice" and that she "should just try and go somewhere [herself] to figure out whether it's the place [she] can go to." These "other people" Emily refers to is her parents' friends.

Rita, too, noted that it is often not students themselves that fear going abroad but that their decisions are influenced by other people. She specifically talked about students' parents by giving an example of her friends' parents:

If I hadn't had my previous experiences abroad, I would have had the lack of self-confidence. Student might also experience the lack of support from parents. Parents are overprotecting because they want them to be safe. I have two friends who would benefit from this experience but their parents are very restrictive.

Rita also spoke about a lack of marketing. While she noted that due to her previous exposure to traveling abroad, she did not need to be reached out to, but thought that "a lack of marketing or just information that specifically targeted students with disabilities" might be a factor preventing students with disabilities from studying abroad.

Laura commented on how some students are even nervous about "typical travel":

Students with disabilities can be divided into two groups. One group would go anywhere and then the bigger group is too afraid to even try. They are nervous even about typical travel.

She thinks that "if there was a way to talk to someone in the study abroad office or alumni, that would be helpful."

John's factor, initially preventing him to study abroad, was his concern about mobility:

I basically wanted to go to [X country] but I thought that it might present some mobility problems. I thought after that I wouldn't study abroad because it would be easier and I knew how to get around.

Confronting Doubts

The third theme emerged from the interviews with students with disabilities reflects the confronting doubts process students had to go through when planning to study abroad. Some students with disabilities experienced moments when they had to confront their own and others' doubt of their ability to participate in study abroad.

Two students, for instance, John and Laura, reflected on how they both were interested in pursuing study abroad but were very nervous about it. John doubted his ability to participate in study abroad as he thought that it might present some mobility problems for him:

All of my friends were doing it (studying abroad) and I spent a lot of time with the director of international center and she and I talked about how my limitations would affect it. I basically wanted to go to [X country] but I thought that it might present some mobility problems. I thought after that I wouldn't study abroad because it would be easier and I knew how to get around.

Laura noted that while she was interested in studying abroad for quite some time, she had to confront her own doubts that she could do it despite of her fear of how the local culture would perceive her:

I always wanted to study abroad and was always nervous about it because I am hard of hearing. I feared how the local culture was going to look at me.

Besides confronting their own doubts, these findings suggest that students had to also confront others' doubts. After Laura reassured herself that despite the different perception of disability in [X country], she wanted to study abroad there, she also had to confront the doubts of the faculty who was leading the program. She reflected on how the faculty was at first hesitant as she did not know how Laura would do in that program in [X country]. The faculty member seemed to be worried about the safety of the student in

[X country] – she was concerned that the student might get hit by car, for example. After walking through many questions, she also advised her to see a campus adviser.

Emily gave an example of talking to other people (e.g. parents' friends) who seemed to be skeptical about her ability to navigate a certain place:

You tell them: “you know, I’m going to blah-blah-blah”, and they “is it really accessible? How are you going to get around?” And they just tell you from their point of view. But they don’t know really your own ability so they don’t actually know if it’s accessible or not. Like, for instance, for me, I can actually ride escalator so there are a lot of places I could go to that people could think I wouldn’t be able to. It’s all people’s perceptions.

Rita discussed how her friends could benefit from studying abroad but it is challenging for them because “their parents are overprotecting because they want them to be safe.” She also reflected on her experience working with a program provider staff member who was skeptical about her ability to participate in a program that required a lot of travelling:

Program provider was very challenging because the program modeling required a lot of traveling and I could see they were skeptical whether I would be able to do it and how they could accommodate me to make it work.

Further in the interview, Rita mentioned that after coming across a challenge when arranging Rita’s accommodation, this study abroad professional made a comment to perhaps consider other options. After involving Rita’s campus study abroad advisor and back and forth conversation with this program provider staff member, the situation got resolved. As Rita pointed out the most challenging aspect of arranging her study abroad was how much self-advocacy she had to do to make it happen.

Tailored Approach

The fourth theme identified through the interviews with students with disabilities focuses on the need for a tailored approach in advising and marketing. Discussing disability culture, catering to each individual, and implementing outreach efforts specifically targeting students with disabilities were identified as important when working with students with disabilities.

Laura discussed that there was a need for a tailored approach in advising students with disabilities. She explained how discussing local disability cultures was important for her but she did not receive that information:

All the information was the same that is on the website. I didn't feel that they had a special feedback for me, like well, if you go to this X country on this program, this is how you may be perceived. These are the challenges you will encounter. This is what I wanted to hear.

Emily emphasized in her interview the need for the study abroad staff to "cater to each individual." She felt that while the study abroad staff members she worked with (she mainly referred to the program providers) were nice but they did not know enough about her to make proper assessment of her ability:

I think that study abroad staff should cater to each individual. They mostly say, "oh, you have a disability, here is how we'll make it accessible for you but they didn't ask me how I need it to be accessible. Like if I said I have a spinal cord injury, what does that mean to you? It could mean that I could walk or that I might not be able to walk, it can be a million different things.

She suggested that study abroad professionals first ask students a lot of questions before making any assessment of their ability:

They should come up with these different scenarios and they should ask how would you do in this scenario? Let's say you're at a house with stairs, how would you get out of the house with stairs? So basically asking more questions instead of being like oh, this house has stairs, and here is what we're going to do for you. And you are like, wait a minute, I have my own methods of making things accessible because I have been in a wheelchair for twelve years so there are things I know that professionals don't know.

Emily further noted that personally, she is comfortable with people carrying her, so that is an option for her. However, she noted that this question did not come up.

Rita and Laura both stated that study abroad professionals need to reach out to students with disabilities and encourage them to study abroad. Laura suggested that study abroad professionals do that through working with alumni who have studied abroad with a disability. Rita mentioned that while she herself did not need to be reached out to because of her experience traveling abroad previously, she observed that very few students with disabilities participate in study abroad and noted that the only way to fill the gap is to reach out to these students.

For example, creating brochures or flyers targeting towards students with disabilities, which say, "Yes, you can study abroad! Make an appointment with the study abroad advisor today!"

Study Abroad Professionals Dealing with Students with Disabilities for the First Time

The last emergent theme identified in this study provides instances of study abroad professionals who were dealing with students with disabilities for the first time. Emily, for example, recalled that she was told that she was the second student in all the program history being in a wheelchair and studying abroad, so "they didn't really know how to deal with [her] situation. She also thought that while the study abroad staff was

nice, she did not feel that they made proper assessment of her ability as when she arrived to [X country] “they were really shocked to see [her] wheelchair which is very small and before [she] got there they were saying, oh, you’re not going to be able to fit into the space.” As she pointed out, her wheelchair is “the most light-weight and expensive wheelchair in the market because I am a really able-bodied person.”

Rita noted that because she was the first person with disabilities to participate in the program, the process was a lot more challenging for the study abroad staff member overseas who was working with her:

I think it’s a lack of understanding and not lack of desire to work. She had a lot to learn, and just through the experience with me, she learned a lot. Now I know that after me someone wouldn’t hopefully have hard time as I did.

Laura also mentioned that she was the very first person with a disability to go on that faculty-led program, therefore, she felt that the faculty was initially hesitant and did not know how Emily would do in X country. While abroad, Laura came across different situations when she felt it would have been helpful to have known about these possible scenarios before she left so that she could have requested proper accommodation. For example, she mentioned that there was a big lecture happening at the university and while she attended it, she was not able to hear anything. She said that if she knew that there would be these big lectures taking place during her stay there, she would have requested a note-taker, for example. Like Rita, Laura felt that it will be easier for the next student with disability to participate in the program. She noted that it would be very helpful for the other students with disabilities to be able to talk to someone in the study abroad office who had disability and studied abroad, or even to have contact information of the alumni

with disability who studied abroad to leave their contact information so that potential students could talk to them.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION: UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND TAILORED APPROACH, DISCREPANCY IN PERCEPTIONS, FACULTY'S ROLE, AND STUDENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The findings of this study suggest that one of the biggest challenges study abroad professionals were faced with was students' lack of self-disclosure. They were concerned with either students with disabilities not disclosing at all or disclosing late in the process. Students with hidden disabilities, according to some study abroad professionals, tended to disclose their disability less frequently than students with visible disabilities. Because disclosure is not required and is asked only after students' acceptance, study abroad professionals were faced with the challenge of encouraging early disclosure in order to ensure that accommodations can be made in the host country. This suggests that none of the study abroad professionals utilized the principles of Universal Design and instead they had to create adaptations and new structures on short notice every time there was a new request. It also suggests that there was a significant amount of effort dedicated to fostering disclosure rather than to creating "a variety of accommodations in place as a permanent feature of the program," (Soneson & Cordano, 2009, p. 277). These findings suggest that because there is a lack of flexible on-site environment, the study abroad program staff have to respond to requests and accommodations needs as they arise.

While the disclosure issue was very significant for study abroad professionals, it did not seem to be on the students' horizons at all. None of the students interviewed spoke about disclosure. This mismatch in answers could be related to the differences in perceptions about what is important for each in the process of arranging study abroad. It

could be also related to a whole other host of factors, including the students having disclosed their disability early in the process so their accommodations were arranged easily, these students not having any fear of disclosing their disability, or their disability being visible, while it is more common for students with hidden disabilities to fail to disclose more often than those with visible disabilities.

Another important finding of the current study is the discrepancy between study abroad professionals' and students' perceptions of the cost of study abroad for students with disabilities. While study abroad professionals indicated that cost can be an issue, the interviews with the students revealed that they did not consider it to be an issue. In fact, when asked to discuss any possible factors preventing students with disabilities from studying abroad, not one student mentioned the cost and lack of funding as potential factor. Instead, students focused more on the human factor - students fearing to study abroad because they did not know how the foreign culture would perceive them, or they would talk about lack of support from parents and "other people," such as parents' friends influencing students' perceptions of travel and study abroad. The explanation for this discrepancy can be that students who have been interviewed for this study did not themselves encounter any financial difficulties associated with studying abroad with their disability, and therefore, they did not consider it as a factor preventing students from studying abroad because they probably discussed those factors based on their own experiences. It could also be that it is a perception out there, as Brittany argues, that cost is the major issue while "the majority of students have learning disability, it's not the expectation that you take a historic building in a European country and expect to re-do it" (Brittany). Study abroad in general can be very expensive, and while there might be extra

expenses associated with special accommodation requests, it could be that if a student can afford to study abroad in general, those extra costs are not going to be significant, especially if the program or the university partially assists with providing those accommodations. In addition to that, many students with disabilities could have already been receiving financial aid and scholarships at their home institutions which they were able to apply for their study abroad program.

A third interesting finding was that while study abroad professionals reported various ways to specifically reach out to students with disabilities, only one study abroad professional (Brittany) mentioned that they were utilizing past study abroad students with disabilities to encourage students with disabilities to study abroad. In contrast, some students interviewed in this study spoke specifically about utilizing alumni as a way to reach out to and encourage students with disabilities to study abroad. This suggests that there might be a discrepancy between perceptions of study abroad professionals and students with disabilities about what methods work best for encouraging students with disabilities to study abroad. Another observation which is relevant to the discussion above is that students with disabilities have not been utilized as possible resources for training study abroad staff about students' with disabilities needs. While study abroad professionals seem to collaborate with disability services staff, based on these interviews, it is apparent that students themselves are often not a part of these collaboration efforts. As Emily says, "I have been in a wheelchair for twelve years so there are things I know that professionals don't know."

As suggested earlier in this thesis, the faculty's role has been often omitted from the discussion of the collaboration when working with students with disabilities. My

findings support this statement as only one study abroad professional mentioned briefly her work with faculty members who were doing faculty-led programs. However, the rest of the interviewed study abroad professionals did not speak about their collaboration with faculty. One of the students interviewed for this study actually participated in a faculty-led program and reflected on how this faculty member was her first and main point of contact.

While tailored approach emerged as a theme in both interviews with students with disabilities and study abroad professionals, the findings present some differences in perceptions about and practices of tailored approach. Study abroad professionals, for example, spoke extensively about using the tailored approach in recruiting students with disabilities to study abroad. Students with disabilities, in addition to discussing a tailored outreach approach, also discussed the need for a tailored approach in advising. For example, they talked about how it would have been helpful to talk to someone about the local disability culture or for study abroad professionals not to make any assumptions but rather ask more questions to a student to properly assess his/her needs. One explanation for why study abroad professionals do not bring up the topic of disability culture in [X country] in their advising, for example, could be related to the issue of disclosure. It could also be related to other factors, including on-campus study abroad staff thinking that program providers cover that information. However, as one of the interviews suggests, the program provider staff in the U.S. thought it was the on-site (host country) staff that talks to about the different disability culture once a student arrives to the site.

The emergent theme of tailored approach and outreach seems to contradict the idea of the Universal Design. While in my recommendations I highlight both as

important, I acknowledge that these two concepts can contradict each other. My motivation to stress both of these concepts comes from the fact that due to the different disability culture, it could be difficult to utilize the principles of the Universal Design where the infrastructure is not in place, and therefore, a tailored approach needs to be utilized, especially in direct exchange programs, as opposed to study abroad programs run by program providers. In fact, Universal Design and a tailored approach can complement one another. For example, while utilizing the principles of Universal Design can result in the improvement of the physical environment (e.g. classroom on the first floor), tailored approach will allow study abroad professionals to talk about disability culture with a student during the application process so that a student can make an informed decision about where to study abroad. As for tailored outreach, while it might seem to contradict Universal Design, depending on the context, tailored outreach and Universal Design can actually be one and the same. For example, sending out letters to students with disabilities inviting them to consider study abroad could be considered to be a kind of tailored outreach. However, if the study abroad office is sending out similar letters to other underrepresented students, for example, to science students, this is then an example of the Universal Design. Thus, as seen in this example, there can be really just a fine line between tailored outreach and the Universal Design, depending on the context.

Although confronting doubts seems to be a big part of students' experience arranging their study abroad, the findings of this study suggest that study abroad professionals may not even be aware of this. Besides confronting their own doubts, according to this study, students with disabilities also had to confront the doubts of others – their parents, study abroad professionals, and faculty. It is common for any parent of a

student, with disabilities or without disabilities, to be nervous about their children going abroad on their own, especially if they have not traveled abroad alone before. Parents of students with disabilities may be even more nervous about them studying abroad, especially if students with disabilities want to go to places which are not accessible and where disability laws are very different from the ones in the U.S.

Study abroad professionals and faculty may be nervous about having a student with disability on their program as they may not have had any student with disability on the program before, so because of their lack of experience they may be having a negative mindset rather than a positive one. I acknowledge that while the principles of the Universal Design seem to make sense in the U.S. culture, it might be a lot harder to utilize this design in, for example, rural areas in countries where there is a lack of infrastructure and where certain types of disability might be viewed negatively. Because disability is socially and culturally constructed, study abroad professionals may be concerned about the student's well-being abroad and therefore, they might develop a negative mindset rather than a positive one. According to one of the presentations by MIUSA, "our mindset going into a task will affect the outcome. While we may not have the power to resolve all disability accommodation needs, either a positive versus negative outlook will determine how successful we will be in assisting a student with a disability. We can avoid a mindset by utilizing our curiosity... [by asking] What are some alternative ways to get around? versus That country has no accessible transportation"(Scheib, 2010). As the findings indicate, students with disabilities encountered study abroad professionals with a lack of experience with students with disabilities, who expressed their skepticism rather than a positive outlook which

promoted students to confront their doubts and prove that they will be able to participate in the program successfully. However, as Rita mentioned, that required a whole lot of self-advocacy. Study abroad professionals, as these findings indicate, may not be aware of how much support students with disabilities need in the process of arranging their study abroad program, or they may not be aware that they can be providing that support by collaborating with parents of students with disabilities or utilizing past participants with disabilities, or by checking constantly how their experience or lack of it could influence students' decision to participate in study abroad.

The findings also indicate that all students with disabilities interviewed for this study developed competence in at least one of Chickering's seven vectors of identity development for college students. This suggests that Chickering's theory is applicable to a new area where it has not been tested before. Only one study by Shames and Alden (2005) applied the theory to the domain of study abroad for students with disabilities, but it did not explore how students moved through the seven vectors. The results of this study provide significant insights into how students with disabilities can develop healthy identities in a study abroad environment. As stated earlier in the literature review, in conventional learning environments students with disabilities, particularly with learning disabilities, might perceive themselves as less competent due to the success rate being measured by students' test scores. As this study illustrates, study abroad can be an environment for students with disabilities to develop competences in some or all the seven vectors. This is a significant finding as it suggests study abroad professionals should consider revisiting their programming so that they can create opportunities for students to develop competencies in all the seven vectors.

CHAPTER VIII

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, I offer recommendations to study abroad professionals to improve their current and future practices when working with students with disabilities in the following areas: philosophy & policy, Universal Design, utilization of past participants with disabilities as role models and mentors, effective collaboration with disability services, educational sessions and training, collaboration with faculty, outreach, development of scholarships, and fostering early disclosure. I also provide recommendations for future research.

Philosophy & Policy

Recognize the benefits of inclusion of students with disabilities in study abroad, the impact on their identity development, and the impact on their environment (refer to Chapter VI – *Perceived Benefits* and *The Impact of Study Abroad*). Make their participation, possibly under the umbrella of diverse students’ participation in general, an institutional priority.

Universal Design

Utilize Universal Design in the study abroad context to assist multiple students by removing barriers. In a study abroad context, this will reduce the concerns of study abroad professionals about students’ with disabilities lack of self-disclosure. In addition to this, this will reduce the amount of efforts spent on having to modify the environment specifically for each individual request. Consider seven principles of Universal Design as outlined in Chapter III, and incorporate concepts of Universal Design in the five

environments, suggested by Sonesson et al in Chapter III: 1) physical, 2) academic, 3) cultural, 4) informational, and 5) policy/programmatic. For instance, when creating promotional materials, include in them images of students with disabilities studying abroad, as well as other minority students. This promotional material will serve a diverse group of students. On-site staff in a host country should consider offering classrooms on the ground floor, for example.

Utilization of Past Participants with Disabilities as Role Models and Mentors

Students with disabilities who have traveled or studied abroad previously can be great resources and can serve as student advisory committee members or peer mentors who can help prospective students to “explore options and determine what physical, programmatic, informational, and attitudinal barriers they may face when traveling abroad” (Johnson, 2000). In this study, only one study abroad professional mentioned that they utilized past participants with disabilities by hiring them as interns to work in their office while there was a clearly the need among students with disabilities, identified by interviewed students, in talking to alumni with disabilities.

Effective Collaboration with Disability Services

Collaboration with disability services can be an effective mode of reaching out to students with disabilities. Rather than collaborating with disability services reactively, when the need arises, I suggest to consider effective collaboration which includes proactive collaboration efforts, not simply around accommodation requests but also around outreach to students with disabilities. For instance, setting up an advising table once a month at the disability services office or sending out letters to the students registered with disability services to encourage them to come in for an advising

appointment and to consider studying abroad. Refer to Chapter V for other examples of effective collaboration efforts.

Educational Sessions and Training

Invite disability services staff to provide training to study abroad staff about the needs, skills, and interests of students with disabilities. Likewise, check whether this type of training is offered by disability services staff to student affairs educators and faculty and attend it. Invite students with disabilities who studied abroad to be a part of this training and share their experiences. (The idea for this recommendation was adapted from the interviews for this study and from the work of Nichols and Quaye).

Collaboration with Faculty

Reach out to faculty as they play a key role in encouraging students to study abroad. Many study abroad participants report that they learned about study abroad opportunities through a professor. By identifying and reaching out to faculty, study abroad professionals can increase students' with disabilities participation in study abroad. For example, when reaching out to a professor who teaches a course which is often attended by students with disabilities, this professor may add information about study abroad opportunities to the syllabus. In addition to that, it is important to closely collaborate with faculty members who do faculty-led programs as often students first contact them, so it is important that these faculty members are also invited to educational sessions or trainings planned by study abroad and disability services offices. Further, while professors may not have any students with disabilities registered for their program, they can be asked to assess the site and how flexible it would be to make modifications to meet the needs of diverse students. For example, the faculty member interviewed for this

study mentioned that every time she would lead students on excursions or to local restaurants, she would be assessing how someone who uses a wheelchair, for example, would be able to be part of those excursions and activities. Faculty who are not leading study abroad programs can be also asked to visit sites if they happen to be attending a conference abroad. (The idea for this recommendation was adapted from the interview with the faculty member who leads a study abroad program and from the article by Nasha Lewis).

Outreach

Develop a tailored outreach approach to students with disabilities. Collaborate with disability services to provide a link to your study abroad website on their webpage, for example. Include the images of students with disabilities who studied abroad in all promotional materials and publications. Collaborate with disability services to send out letters or emails to students to let them know about study abroad programs available at their institution. For more examples, please refer to Chapter V.

Development of Scholarships

Funds permitting, develop scholarships to provide a clear message to students with disabilities that increasing diversity is a priority for your office. These scholarships can be general scholarships for underrepresented students in study abroad or can be specifically for students with disabilities.

Fostering Early Disclosure

While utilizing the Universal Design can reduce the problem of nondisclosure or late disclosure, it is important to consider fostering early disclosure. This can be achieved by creating a welcoming environment for students to disclose. For example, a webpage

on your study abroad website that provides information for students underrepresented in study abroad can include information and encouragement for people with disabilities.

Future Research

In addition to the above recommendations, I suggest *Future Research* to look into the following areas:

- Deeper examination of how study abroad enhanced students' with disabilities development based on Chickering's theory of student development would provide profound insights on the impact of study abroad on students with disabilities.
- Examine specific reasons why students with disabilities failed to disclose their disability when applied to study abroad.
- Assess whether the Universal Design is utilized in the study abroad context.

Conclusion

Study abroad offers myriad benefits for students including gaining a better understanding of the world and oneself, reduction of ethnocentrism, new gained skills to compete in a global market, and much more. As more and more institutions are committing to internationalization of their campuses, study abroad becomes an important part of college students' experiences. Further, many majors require or highly recommend that students study abroad. Therefore, institutions have to be prepared to work with diverse student populations who have been previously underrepresented in study abroad.

As illustrated by the current study, students' with disabilities development can be significantly enhanced through their experience studying abroad. However, as the

findings indicate, presently study abroad professionals and students with disabilities face challenges in the process of arranging study abroad. This study brings to light the needs, considerations, and challenges faced by study abroad professionals and students with disabilities. Understanding the current practices is an important step in moving forward with ensuring that everyone has an equal access to international education and all the benefits it provides.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ABROAD PROFESSIONALS

- Could you please describe your experiences working with students with disabilities interested in studying abroad?
- What type of training on advising students with disabilities about study abroad did you receive prior to your first experience with a student with a disability?
- When advising students with disabilities how would be your approach and the topics discussed the same or different than when you advise any other study abroad student? Please describe any different considerations or questions, if any.
- What has been most challenging about your experience working with students with disabilities interested in study abroad?
- What has been most rewarding about your experience working with students with disabilities interested in study abroad?
- What support or resources have you used or do you think would help you when working with students with disabilities? Please describe where to find these resources.
- What offices and organizations, both on and off campus, have you or would you consult/work with in order to assist students with disabilities interested in or preparing to study abroad? How were (or would be) these resources helpful to you?
- How do you think study abroad might be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities?

- What methods have you found most effective for encouraging students with disabilities to study abroad? Are these the same or different than for any other study abroad student?
- What factors do you think prevent students with disabilities from studying abroad?
- Did you experience any institutional obstacles in reaching out to or working with students with disabilities?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- What type of a disability do you have?
- How did you decide to study abroad?
- How did you learn about study abroad programs offered through your institution?
- Who or what office/organization did you approach first to indicate your desire to study abroad? When did you approach these individuals/offices/organizations? What did you discuss with each office/organization?
- When did you disclose your disability? Before you were accepted or after? Why?
- What information you wish had received before leaving for a study abroad program?
- Did you request special accommodations for studying abroad? How were they arranged? Was it an extra cost for you?
- Did you have any concerns about studying abroad or experience any challenges during your application process to study abroad? If so, what were those?
- What impact did study abroad have on you? What benefits did you gain from your participation in study abroad?
- What factors do you think prevent students with disabilities from studying abroad?
- How do you think study abroad offices can better reach out to students with disabilities?
- How do you think study abroad might be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities?
- What advice would you give to other students with disabilities interested in studying abroad?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 2: Interviewee Demographic Information

| <i>Study Abroad Professional</i> | <i>Professional Role</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Institution Type</i> |
|---|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Mary | Study Abroad Advisor | United States | Large public university |
| Kelly | On-site Director | Europe | Program provider |
| Johanna | Study Abroad Coordinator | United States | Small private university |
| Jillian | Study Abroad Coordinator | United States | Program provider |
| Richard | Director of Study Abroad | United States | Small private university |
| Rebecca | Assistant Director of Study Abroad | United States | Small undergraduate college |
| Susan | Director of Study Abroad | United States | Large public university |
| Victoria | On-site Director | Europe | Program provider |
| Anna | Study Abroad Advisor | United States | Large public university |
| Brittany | Program Provider Staff | United States | Program provider |

| <i>Faculty</i> | <i>Institution</i> | <i>Study Abroad Program Location</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Danielle | Large public university | Africa |

| <i>Student</i> | <i>Disability</i> | <i>Institution in the U.S.</i> | <i>Study Abroad Destination</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Emily | Spinal Cord Injury | Small private college | Asia |
| Michelle | Cerebral Palsy | Small private college | Europe and Africa |
| John | Cerebral Palsy | Small private college | Oceania |
| Rita | Cerebral Palsy | Large public university | South America |
| Laura | Hard of Hearing | Large public university | Africa |

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