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## Why do Gen Y students study abroad? Individual growth and the intent to study abroad

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## **Why do Gen Y students study abroad?**

### **Individual growth and the intent to study abroad**

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This paper proposes that Generation Y college students' desire for individual growth is a critical factor that motivates them to express the intent to study abroad, and that five additional variables -- gender, parents' educational level, prior international experience, age, and household income -- moderate the direct influence of the desire for individual growth on the intent to study abroad.

Students bound for college demonstrate high levels of global awareness, and many look forward to international learning experiences in college (ACE, 2008). In fact, 55 percent of college-bound students polled indicated that they are certain or fairly certain they will participate in study abroad, with another 26 percent indicating a strong desire to study abroad (ACE, 2008). Nevertheless, less than 3 percent of college students actually study abroad (IIE, 2011; Marcum, 2001). This difference between college-bound intent and study abroad execution in college is significant, and we examine this disconnect.

The unique contribution of our study is that we suggest that temporal distance affects the intent to study abroad and the actual study abroad action. Many past studies on study abroad has surveyed students as freshman, which is one to three years before many are able to act on their earlier intent to study abroad (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009; Salisbury,

Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2010; Stroud, 2010). We argue that the longer the time lag, the weaker the connection between intent and action becomes (Chintagunta & Lee, 2012; De Cannière, De Pelsmacker, & Geuens, 2010; Smith et al., 2008). As the temporal distance, or time lag, increases between intention and action, certain biases may affect the accuracy of the stated intention (Alexander, Lynch, & Wang, 2008; Morwitz, 1997; Van Ittersum, 2012). We attempt to reduce this time lag or temporal distance by asking students about their intent to study abroad during their third and fourth years of university study. We posit that this will reduce the influence of other behavioral control factors (Fitzsimmons, Flanagan, & Wang, 2013), such as financial constraints, a job, a relationship, or pressure to graduate, that might determine whether the student will actually study abroad.

The distance between intent and action due to time lag is called the “yes! d\*\*n!” effect (Zauberman & Lynch, 2005). The “yes! d\*\*n!” effect suggests that people often agree to do things that are in the distant future because they assume they will have the time and resources to do so, only to find in the future they have neither. For example, college freshmen often report a high intent to study abroad, with up to 63% of freshmen sampled across multiple universities declaring intent (Salisbury et al., 2010). However, the number of students who actually study abroad during college is much lower, only 1.4 percent among US college students in 2010-2011 (IIE, 2011). By surveying students who are further along in their studies, we attempt to shorten the time lag and mitigate the “yes! d\*\*n!” effect.

Generation Y (Gen Y), also known as Millennials, are people born between the seventeen- year period of 1977 and 1994 (Broadbridge, Maxwell, & Ogden, 2007; Markert, 2004; New Strategist, 2009). The group numbers about 70+ million in the United States, and

research has examined its members' lifestyles, preferences, attitudes, communication styles, consumption behavior (Johnson, 2006), technological expertise (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010), work ethic and expectations (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Eisner, 2005), academic goals, and achievements (Deal et al., 2010; Meister & Willyerd, 2010). The interest in the Gen Y demographic is due to their distinctive characteristics when compared to other generations. In the United States, Gen Y has been exposed almost since birth to very rapid technological advances, manifested by unprecedented and immediate access to information, multiple and new technologies, and perhaps the largest assortment of media channels in modern history (Johnson, 2006). They are a more diverse, tolerant, and relatively affluent demographic group (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003) that seeks abundant personal growth and development opportunities (Johnson, 2006). People who are part of Gen Y have a "worldview that informs their education, careers, choices and lifestyles," and a desire for firsthand experiences that shakes up their routine, engages their senses, and stimulates personal growth. (Johnson, 2006, p. 4-8)

### **The Desire for Individual Growth**

Gen Y's desire experiences that provide individual growth, and this is evident in their purchasing behavior. Gen Y feel that brands and products help them express their personality, freedom, and independence (Noble, Haytko, & Philips, 2009). Gen Y is exposed to many products and services from many sources, many have more purchasing power than people of prior generations (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003; Belleau, Summers, Xu, & Pinel, 2007; Tomkins, 1999), and many are highly brand conscious and loyal. Noble et al. (2009) identify the Gen Y student who buys OPI Cha Ching Cherry nail polish to convey her "wild and crazy personality," and another who purchases a Honda Accord as "a true representation of his conservative

personality” (p. 621-22). Thus, Gen Y are concerned about image and trends (Gupta, Brantley, & Jackson, 2010; Noble et al., 2009), and how new technology influences product choices (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). Gen Y believes their purchasing behavior defines them, helps them build identity and status, and gives them independence (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Noble et al., 2009).

We argue that this desire for identity and independence is seen in their decisions about study abroad. Students value the independence, unique experiences, and cultural encounters that study abroad provides (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006), and students who studied abroad score higher on the “experience seeking” subscale, indicating a desire for unusual experience, than non-study abroad students (Schroth & McCormack, 2000).

Behavioral beliefs about study abroad outcomes are linked to intentions and later behaviors (Geol, de Jong, & Schnusenberg, 2010). The desire for individual growth is one behavioral belief that explains why Gen Y college students say they intend to participate in study abroad programs (Albers-Miller, Prenshaw, & Straughan, 1999; Bakalis & Joiner, 2004; Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1991; Toncar & Cudmore, 2000), even among non-US students (Sánchez et al., 2006). Gen Y individuals search for growth-related experiences, such as study abroad, because they strive to have a balanced lifestyle (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010) that includes high levels of social interaction and teamwork, connectedness, growth opportunities, and meaning (Meister & Willyerd, 2010; Ng et al., 2010). This leads to the following proposition:

*Proposition: The desire for individual growth motivates Gen Y students' intent to study abroad.*

We also argue that other important variables moderate the influence of the desire for individual growth on the intent of today's Gen Y college students to study abroad. We explore the moderating effects of five variables that occur frequently in the literature about study abroad that may influence students' study abroad intent: their gender, their parents' educational level, their prior international experience, their age, and their household income. Below we discuss the variables and the effect they will have on the relationship between the desire for individual growth and intent to study abroad. Figure 1 highlights the proposed theoretical model and the hypothesized relationships.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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## **Gender**

Female college students are more likely to study abroad than males, according to many studies (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Dessoiff, 2006; Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Lucas, 2009; Shirley, 2006; Stroud, 2010; Thomas & McMahon, 1998). Women are more likely than men to declare the intent to study abroad (Stroud, 2010), the willingness to study abroad (Hackney, Boggs, & Borozan, 2012) and to actually study abroad (Dessoiff, 2006). This is true for women in fields such as engineering,

business and the physical sciences (Salisbury et al., 2010) that tend to have a higher percentage of male students.

Kim & Goldstein (2005) found that women have more positive intercultural attitudes than men, showing less ethnocentrism, prejudice and intercultural communication apprehension. This suggests women may be more open-minded and have more positive attitudes about international experiences. US male students, in contrast, seek growth experiences and social integration more among their local college peers, and they may be less inclined to abandon their social network to study abroad (Fischer, 2012). Interestingly, when US female college students study abroad, they often look for thrills, adventure (Schroth & McCormack, 2000), new experiences, and freedom (Presley, Damron-Martinez, & Zhang, 2010; Sánchez et al., 2006), which are linked to achieving individual growth. Given the majority of evidence, we pose the following hypothesis:

***H1:** The desire for individual growth motivates Gen Y women's intent to study abroad more than it motivates Gen Y men's intent.*

### **Parents' Education Levels**

We argue that Gen Y students' desire for individual growth may be related to the educational level achieved by their parents. The educational experiences of students' parents may have an influence on the choices students make during their academic careers. For some students, such as first generation college students or students from underrepresented groups, parents' involvement is critical to how they navigate college life (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). Parents with degrees in higher education tend to encourage their children to earn a university degree, and they influence their

course of study and what they do outside the classroom (Boudarbat & Montmarquette, 2009; Presley et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2010). Indeed, participation in special college programs such as study abroad is much higher among students whose parents have earned a university degree (Miller, 2008), and even higher for female students (Salisbury et al., 2010). This leads to the following hypothesis:

***H2:** The desire for individual growth motivates the intent to study abroad among Gen Y students whose parents have a high level of formal education more than it motivates intent among Gen Y students whose parents do not.*

### **Prior International Experience**

Results of studies of the effect of a student's prior international experience on intent to study abroad are mixed. Some scholars found no relationship between previous international experience and participation in study abroad (Goldstein & Kim, 2006; Stroud, 2010). However, most studies found that prior international experience, including international experiences before college (Harpaz, 2008; Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2011; Pedersen, LaBrie, Hummer, Larimer, & Lee, 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009), positively influence a student's desire to study abroad (American Council on Education, 2008; Athavaley, 2008; Cardon, Marshall, & Poddar, 2011; Hackney, Boggs, & Borozan, 2012). Exploring other countries for the first time lets students test if they can navigate an unknown place. Early international experience builds self-esteem, and teaches them how to function in new situations. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:



*H3: The desire for individual growth motivates the intent to study abroad among Gen Y students who have traveled to or lived in another country, more than it motivates intent among Gen Y students who have not.*

## **Age**

Younger college students, those between 18 and 25 years of age, and older students, who are over 25 years, share many college goals including career-focus and personal development (Bean & Metzner, 1985). While they are all considered Gen Y, younger and older students may make different choices in college, reflecting their different priorities and differences in their social constraints. Younger Gen Y students are more likely to participate in personal growth-related activities in college than older Gen Y students (Bauer & Liang, 2003; Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2010), including study abroad (Athavaley, 2008; Kim & Goldstein, 2005).

The desire to study abroad among older students is less strong. Career focus (Chao & Good, 2004; Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006) and growth (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007) are key goals among older students. But older students are less likely to find personal growth college activities that are not required (Newbold et al., 2010), such as study abroad. Older students may have more significant job experience, more social obligations, and more permanent personal relationships, including spouses and children, which shift their emphasis from “what I can do for me” to “what I must do for my family.” This distinction between younger and older students merits further attention, suggesting that age may influence the intent to study abroad differently among younger (ages 18 to 25 years) students compared to older (over 25 years) students. We argue the following hypothesis:

*H4: The desire for individual growth motivates the intent to study abroad among younger Gen Y students (aged 18-25) more than it motivates intent among older Gen Y students (over 25 years).*

## **Household Income**

The cost – real or perceived -- of study abroad programs influences a student's decision to study abroad (Albers-Miller et al., 1999; Bakalis & Joiner, 2004; Dessoff, 2006; Garver & Divine, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009; Sánchez et al., 2006; Toncar, Reid, & Anderson, 2005). The cost of study abroad was a significant barrier to university students in China, France and the USA; most significantly among Chinese and US students (Sánchez et al., 2006). Business students think study abroad is expensive, that it increases student debt (Sánchez et al., 2006), and they want scholarships and grants to help pay for it (Garver & Divine, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Toncar et al., 2005). Minority students view study abroad positively, but a lack of household financial resources hinders many minority students' ability to participate (Albers-Miller et al., 1999).

Evidence is mixed regarding the relationship between household income and intent to study abroad. Salisbury et al. (2009) found that lower income students are less likely to study abroad than higher income students. Relyea, Cocchiara, and Studdard (2008) found that a third of students who studied abroad had annual family income greater than \$70,000. Yet Stroud (2010) found no significant correlation between household income and the intent to study abroad. In a later study, Salisbury et al. (2010) found that low-income women are less inclined to study abroad, but among men, income level was not significant.

The cost of study abroad might be mitigated by access to more financial resources, so we argue that the greater the student's household income, the more likely he or she is to seek a study abroad experience. Because results of prior studies are mixed, we attempt to study the effect of household income on the relationship between desire for individual growth and intent to study abroad. We propose the following hypothesis:

*H5: The desire for individual growth motivates the intent to study abroad among Gen Y students with higher household incomes more than it motivates intent among Gen Y students with lower household incomes*

## **Sample**

We obtained our sample from upper division business students of all business majors who attended elective international management and marketing classes at a large, regional university located in the Midwestern United States. Many business students of all majors take these classes, and they participated in the project in exchange for extra credit. Our focus on business students is different from other study abroad research that draws from students from multiple majors that might suggest other sources of variance. We surveyed business students only, to control for the differences that may exist due to students' majors. For example, Salisbury et al. (2010) found that non-professional degree seeking students were more likely to study abroad than those seeking professional degrees. Our sample from a regional university is also a departure from prior studies. Many others take place at small, liberal arts colleges, or large, Research I universities. Our focused sample provides a clearer picture of potential gender,

age, education, experience, and financial level variance, addressing certain challenges posed in the literature (Dessoff, 2006; Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Salisbury et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010).

We collected a total of 308 surveys, and we eliminated 16 of those because respondents completed less than 20 percent of the survey. This gave us 292 useable surveys covering a two-semester period. This represents nearly ten percent of the total population of undergraduate business students. Students completed paper surveys in the first semester, and online surveys in the second semester. To avoid duplication, we instructed students that if they took the survey in a prior class, they should not take it again. We found no significant differences in response rate between the paper and online samples. The average reported student age is 23 years; 56.2 percent were women and 43.5 percent were men; 90 percent claimed US citizenship; almost 54 percent of the students stated that they have at least one parent with a college education; and half have reported household incomes between \$40,000 and \$100,000. Over 70 percent of the sample reported to have traveled outside the country, and only 28 percent stated that they had lived outside the United States.

## **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The survey instrument was adopted from Sánchez et al. (2006), who developed motivation categories and created a theoretical model of motivations for study abroad. That survey was developed in two stages. First, a qualitative survey was administered to students who were then involved in a study abroad experience, and to students who were studying in their home country. Second, and based on the results of the first survey, Sánchez et al (2006)

developed 64 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Included with these items were questions on demographics and international experience.

Our analysis began with a preliminary factor analysis using our sample of 292. Eight of Sánchez et al.'s (2006), original 64 items failed to load on any factors (with loadings less than 0.5). We eliminated these items, resulting in an instrument with 56 items. We performed a final exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation producing eight distinct factors reflecting Sánchez et al.'s (2006) factors, with two additional constructs: Gain New Experiences ( $\alpha=.962$ ), Social/Educational Success ( $\alpha=.885$ ), Individual Growth ( $\alpha=.883$ ), International Business Success ( $\alpha=.865$ ), Language ( $\alpha=.900$ ), Future Family's Well-Being ( $\alpha=.847$ ), Freedom ( $\alpha=.736$ ), and Degree Achievement ( $\alpha=.774$ ), explaining 64.79 percent of the total variance. We chose the promax rotation method because the initial varimax rotation resulted in an over-specified primary factor, giving us no useful interpretation of the factors. Per Cureton & Mulaik (1975), the promax rotation allows for appropriate correlation among the items, which addressed the initial factor over-specification. This use of correlation among the items comprising the motivations for study abroad is appropriate, because student motivation to study abroad is not driven only by finances (Sánchez et al., 2006), or a desire to improve understanding of other countries and cultures (Stroud, 2010: 501), or a desire for an exciting experience (Schroth & McCormack, 2000), but by many interrelated goals and desires (Salisbury et al., 2010).

Consistent with our fundamental argument that the desire for individual growth is a key driver of the intent to study abroad among Gen Y students, we further analyzed the Individual Growth factor. Following Hair et al. (2006), we used stepwise regression analysis to test the hypotheses. We provide means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables in Table 1.

Subsequent analysis on the variance of inflations (VIF) indicates that multicollinearity is likely not an issue, as all values are below 5 as recommended by Neter, Wasserman, Kutner and Nachtsheim (1990), with the maximum VIF 1.46.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Table 2 highlights the results of the regression analyses. Model 1 represents the base analysis, which included the control variables Gender ( $\beta = -.097, p = \text{n.s.}$ ), Highest Parental Education ( $\beta = -.030, p = \text{n.s.}$ ), Having Visited Other Countries ( $\beta = .11, p = .089$ ), Having Lived in Another Country ( $\beta = .449, p = .00$ ), age ( $\beta = -.166, p = .006$ ), Household Income ( $\beta = .037, p = \text{n.s.}$ ), and US Citizenship ( $\beta = .085, p = \text{n.s.}$ ). Model 2 demonstrates the main effects of the independent variable, called Individual Growth ( $\beta = .151, p = .018$ ) on the dependent variable Intent to study abroad. This shows support for our Proposition that the desire for Individual Growth is positively related to college students' intent to study abroad.

Models 3-9 confirms the main effects of our variables on the intent to study abroad, and then shows the interactive relationship between our independent variable – Individual Growth – and the five moderating variables. The interaction between Individual Growth and Gender on intent was not significant ( $\beta = .009, p = \text{n.s.}$ ), providing no support for Hypothesis 1. The data from our study suggests that, despite prior research, there is no difference between men's and women's intent to study abroad. The interaction with Parents' Educational Level was also

insignificant ( $\beta = -.021$ ,  $p = \text{n.s.}$ ), providing no support for Hypothesis 2. The data provided only partial support Hypothesis 3, as the relationship between desire for individual growth and intent to study abroad was affected by prior visits abroad ( $\beta = -.235$ ,  $p = .047$ ), but only marginally by having lived abroad ( $\beta = .131$ ,  $p = .08$ ). Age moderated the relationship between individual growth and intent ( $\beta = -.675$ ,  $p = .027$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4 and suggesting that younger students (ages 18-25) are more likely than older students (over 25 years of age) to show intent to study abroad as an indication of their desire for individual growth. Finally, there was no effect of household income on the individual growth – intent to study abroad relationship ( $\beta = -.111$ ,  $p = \text{n.s.}$ ), providing no support for Hypothesis 5.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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## **Discussion**

The results of our study show support for our general proposition that individual growth motivates Gen Y students to study abroad (Table 2, Model 2). Gen Y students recognize the benefits of fulfilling their own potential, enhancing their experiences, and seeking individual growth, and that study abroad might help them achieve those objectives.

The results of our moderated regression analyses were not as supportive of our five hypotheses, yet the results are interesting and merit discussion. Our results did not support Hypothesis 1, contrary to data from the Commission on the Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship

Program (2005) and other studies that showed that females are more likely to study abroad (Dessoiff, 2006; Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Stroud, 2010; Thomas & McMahon, 1998). We found no difference between men's and women's intent to study abroad, nor did individual growth influence the intent to study abroad differently between men and women. Since Salisbury et al. (2010) found gender differences on intent to study abroad based on students' major, we conducted post-hoc examinations of the population of students from which we drew our sample to see if that finding was replicated. There was no significant difference between men and women *business* majors who actually studied abroad (Chi-Square= 2.67, p=n.s). Yet, when we tested students who studied abroad across *all* majors, including non-professional degrees, more females studied abroad than men (Chi-Square= 293.88, p = .00), supporting Salisbury et al.'s (2010) finding and suggesting that students in professional degree programs may study abroad for reasons that eliminate gender differences.

Our results did not support Hypothesis 2. Students whose parents had higher levels of formal education were no more motivated to study abroad than students whose parents had lower levels of formal education, nor were there significant interaction effects of parental educational level on the relationship between desire for individual growth and study abroad intent. Our findings are consistent with Stroud (2010: 503), who speculated that students are more motivated to study abroad to set themselves apart to future employers, than by pressure from their well-educated parents. Students seem to associate the need to gain experience and the desire to differentiate themselves as ways to achieve individual growth. Future research might investigate this motivating factor further given these conflicting results.



Our results partially supported Hypothesis 3. There is a strong positive relationship between intent to study abroad and prior experience visiting or living abroad. When we add the interaction between Individual Growth and prior international experience to the model, the variable “visited another country” remains significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level, while the variable “lived in another country” is marginally significant. It seems that while “prior international experience” may lead students to declare a strong intent to study abroad, the specific desire for individual growth may be less of a factor to students who “lived abroad.” These students may believe they already gained the benefits associated with individual growth during the prior experience, and may view a second trip to “study abroad,” while beneficial and desirable, as not necessarily a life-changing, growth-charged experience.

Our results supported Hypothesis 4. Students of a younger age consistently proved to have significant effects in our model. The direct effect of age on intent to study abroad was significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level, indicating that younger students express the intent to study abroad more than older students. Age was significant at  $p < 0.05$ , when age was included as a moderator of the relationship between individual growth and intent to study abroad. Younger Gen Y students may be less influenced by family, financial, and career obligations, less risk averse, and more willing to seek new opportunities through study abroad (Bauer & Liang, 2003; Newbold et al., 2010) than older students. Older Gen Y students may be more enveloped in complex family and financial obligations, and less willing to seek individual growth through a program that takes them from their homes for an extended time period. Interestingly, results of our post-hoc examination showed that upper division (junior and senior) students in professional schools *and* across all majors were significantly more likely to execute the study abroad decision than lower

division (freshman and sophomore) students ( $\text{Chi-Square}_{\text{professional}} = 27.17, p = .00$ ;  $\text{Chi-Square}_{\text{total population}} = 163.97, p = .00$ ). Younger students, typically freshmen and sophomores, may still be assessing majors, career paths, and adjusting to the demands of college, (Bauer & Liang, 2003; Moghaddam, Peyvandi, & Wang, 2009; Newbold et al., 2010; Relyea et al., 2008), and are not in a position to actually study abroad, while older, upper division students may have these issues resolved and can therefore execute their decision.

Our results did not support Hypothesis 5. The main effects of household income on intent to study abroad were not significant, nor were the interaction effects with individual growth. We were not surprised, because previous studies have failed to find a consistent relationship between household income and intent to study abroad. It seems that the question about household income may be problematic. Students may not know what their household income is such that data collected could be misinterpreted (Stroud, 2010). For example, students may think the question refers to their own individual income and not “household (or parental) income,” regardless of whether their parents pay for their education or not. Our findings support other studies (de Jong, Schnusenber, & Goel, 2010; Stroud, 2010;) that found no relationship between intent to study abroad and income.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of our study is actually one of its advantages: the sample included only business students at a large, Midwestern US university. The advantage is that it addresses the unique needs of business students in one part of the country. But the results are not widely generalizable, and it would be useful to test a geographically heterogeneous group of business

students by sampling students at similarly sized and focused universities located elsewhere in the US. Students at schools on the east and west coasts of the US tend to study abroad in higher numbers than those from US universities located elsewhere (NAFSA, 2011), and the results of such a study might vary in interesting ways.

A second limitation is that respondents may have misunderstood the question about household income. Some may have thought it meant personal student income, while others may have viewed it as parental income. We intended to measure differences in the resources that students have to complete their university studies, and prior research directed us to the variable “household income” (Relyea et al., 2008; Stroud, 2010) reflecting overall family income. However, it is possible that respondents may not have differentiated their own personal, student income from their parents’ income. It may be useful to rephrase this question and to ask follow-up questions similar to those in de Jong et al.’s (2010) study of business students, in which they found that most students did not expect their parents to contribute to the cost of a study abroad.

### **Theoretical Implications and Future Research**

Future research could further explore the link – and the disconnect -- between intent and action in study abroad decisions by applying other models, such as the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein, 1967) to test the relationship. The reasoned action approach suggests that other subjective factors may play a role in influencing purchasing decisions, and it could be applied to study abroad. Our study suggests that temporal distance or a time lag exists between the

statement of intent and the act of study abroad, therefore subjective norms may play a more significant role than if a time lag did not exist.

Future studies might also test the moderating effect of a student's major on the relationship between other factors and the intent to study abroad. Our study showed no significant gender differences in intent to study abroad, despite prior research to the contrary and the fact that 65 percent of U.S. college students who study abroad are women (Institute of International Education, 2011). But our post-hoc finding that there are gender differences among *all* students at the university who actually studied abroad, but no differences among *business* students who did so, supports Salisbury et al.'s (2010) work and suggests that a student's major may influence the effect of other drivers on the intent to study abroad.

Other future research on business study abroad might examine student motivations within a geographically heterogeneous sample of business students from US universities of many sizes and types. While the Institute of International Education's Open Doors® (2011) publishes a periodic, macro-level report of international study activity at universities, it does not examine student motivations for doing so at the micro-level. A comprehensive study of student motivations at more higher education institutions would be useful as business schools and universities try to understand the dynamics that drive students' international study decisions.

### **Managerial Implications for Practice**

Business schools worldwide understand that global knowledge, global skills, and global attitudes are critical student learning goals (AACSB International, 2011: 3; Olson, Green, & Hill, 2008). Companies that hire business students expect business schools to prepare graduates for a

global environment: more than three-quarters of adult respondents in the United States said students should have a study abroad experience during college (Marcum, 2001).. AACSB standards suggest to its members that business school curricula “will prepare graduates to operate in a business environment that is global in scope. Graduates should be prepared to interact with persons from other cultures and to manage in circumstances where business practices and social conventions are different from the graduate’s native country” (AACSB International, 2011: 3) yet only a small fraction of business students study abroad. Study abroad may have other benefits: it can increase university revenues by providing an income stream of tuition, diversify the student body, and add value to academic programs in business (Sánchez et al., 2006). AACSB International has encouraged its member schools to increase international business programming for graduate and undergraduate students for over a decade. Most business schools now offer international courses in accounting, marketing, management, finance, and information technology, and many offer extensive student study abroad options (Tucker, 2003).

Business students make up over 20% of all US students who study abroad, topped by students in the social sciences who comprise over 22% (IIE, 2011). Nearly 274,000 US students of all majors received academic credit for study abroad in 2010-11. This was a 4 percent increase over the prior year (IIE, 2011). Yet, this is still only 1.4 percent of all U.S. college students (IIE, 2011), not nearly enough exposure to generate the desired global learning outcomes among these young people.

Marketing messages might better focus on those factors that motivate students to study abroad. Promotional messages for study abroad might emulate the messaging used to promote durable and infrequently purchased goods, such as automobiles or flat screen televisions.

Promotions for these types of goods require repeat advertisements that reinforce the benefits and information about the product (Alexander et al. 2008; Bronnenberg et al., 2008; Sethi, Prasad, & He, 2008). Keeping study abroad programs and their individual growth benefits on students' radar through multiple in-person and online messages might encourage more to act on their intent when it is time to do so (Funkhouser & Parker, 1999).

The cost of study abroad – perceived or real -- influences a student's decision to participate or not (Ali & Subramaniam, 2010; Lyanna & Abraham, 2012), and it affects the relationship between intent and action. The temporal distance effect suggests that students do intend to study abroad until they think about the cost of doing so. Many students from our study perceive that study abroad will cost more than study at their home university: 86 percent said that study abroad would be easier if it were not so expensive. But the perception is not always in line with fact. The cost of higher education in the US has increased by 42 percent between 2000 and 2011, such that some study abroad programs may cost less than staying at the home university (NCES, 2012; Ruggeri, 2010; The Princeton Review, 2012). In some locations, the cost may be up to 50 percent less than staying at the home university (Lyanna & Abraham, 2012). Short-term study abroad programs usually have a lower absolute sticker price and carry lower opportunity costs, such as lost wages and rent costs. Promotional campaigns for study abroad might emphasize the “best-value” opportunity they provide, while stressing the personal growth benefits that even a short trip abroad will bring.

Gen Y students respond to promotions and advertising differently than students ten years their senior, possibly because they have grown up with information technology continually in their grasp (Belleau et al., 2007; Johnson, 2006). Millennials view the promotion of affective

(feeling) services more positively than that of informative services in advertising campaigns, suggesting that Gen Y's care more if the service is affective, feeling, and self-satisfying rather than informative (Lepkowska-White & Samph, 2006). Study abroad promotions might be more appealing to Gen Y students if they highlight the emotional benefits of study abroad to personal growth, fun, and excitement, rather than educational or future professional benefits.

Study abroad is a high involvement purchase decision. Gen Y students are price conscious and selective when they make a high involvement purchase (Gupta et al., 2010; Kinley, Josiam, & Lockett, 2010), which includes study abroad. Gen Y's attachment to technology may lead them to join online brand communities, where they discuss products and services with peers, gain a sense of loyalty, belonging and emotional attachment, and which influence purchase intention and behavior (Liaw, 2011). More information helps reinforce the intent to purchase, even over time (Alexander et al., 2008; Morwitz, 1997). Online brand communities for study abroad, where alumni post blogs and photos of their international experiences and invite others to participate, might entice Gen Y students to seek more information and become part of the real, global community created by studying abroad. Universities might encourage these online communities as a way for students to learn more about study abroad beyond the marketing campaigns, thus strengthening the connection between intent and action.

## **Conclusion**

Our study revealed that a desire for individual growth is one of the factors that drive Gen Y students to declare the intent to study abroad, and that students' prior experience visiting

foreign countries and younger age positively moderated how the desire for individual growth affected their intent to study abroad. We found clues that could help market study abroad to students in professional programs. The findings offer some insight into what might be done to increase the number of US study abroad students in this demographic. Importantly, action does not always follow intent, especially if there is a significant time lag or temporal distance between them and if other factors intervene (Alexander et al., 2008; Morwitz, 1997; Van Ittersum, 2012). The “yes...d\*\*n!” effect (Zauberman & Lynch, 2005), by which people commit to do things in the future yet never execute them, may explain this disconnect. When an event such as study abroad is in the distant future, students may declare intent to participate based on its abstract benefits. But when the event becomes imminent, they may reverse their intent as they realize that it takes time and planning to act on study abroad. Our results suggest factors that might keep Gen Y students interested in study abroad between their freshman and junior years, so that students might better plan for and act on the intent to study abroad, despite other distractions. Universities might develop programs to help students plan for study abroad early in their careers, and create mechanisms to help them save time and money for it. As Morwitz (1997) found, greater involvement in the decision-making process and greater connection to the experience may increase the likelihood that Gen Y students implement their intent to study abroad, even if temporal distance is involved.



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Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Intent to Study Abroad	2.91	1.457	1.00	-.129*	.023	.284**	.479**	-.207**	.036	-.057	.305***
2. Gender	.41	.493		1.00	-.133*	-.037	-.112*	-.035	.123**	.093	-.109
3. Highest Parental Education	2.89	.655			1.00	.070	.042	-.013	.222**	.046	-.021
4. Visited Other Countries	.72	.448				1.00	.334**	-.129**	.189**	-.069	.137**
5. Lived in Another Country	.28	.448					1.00	-.062	-.100	-.281**	.223***
6. Age	23.68	4.935						1.00	-.139**	.035	-.298**
7. Household Income	3.38	1.293							1.00	.226***	.062
8. US Citizen	.94	.239								1.00	-.015
9. Individual Growth Factor	.009	.993									1.00

\*\*\* P<0.01, \*\* P<0.05 (2-tailed).

Table 2: Regression

Dependent Variable	Intent to Study Abroad							
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	-.097	-.08	-.079	-.080	-.059	-.066	-.069	-.082
Highest Parental Education	-.03	-.02	-.020	-.021	-.008	-.002	-.024	-.021
Visited Other Countries	.110	.106	.107	.106	.126**	.114	.109	.105
Lived in Another Country	.449***	.418***	.419***	.417***	.408***	.388***	.416***	.420***
Age	-.166***	-.124**	-.124**	-.124**	-.130**	-.128**	-.183***	-.123**
Household Income	.037	.028	.028	.028	.019	.018	.019	.032
US Citizen	.085	.077	.077	.077	.071	.066	.084	.078
Individual Growth Factor		.151**	.145	.171	-.051	.082	.795***	.252
Growth X Gender			.009					
Growth X Parent Education				-.021				
Growth X Visited					.235 **			
Growth X Lived						.131		
Growth X Age							-.675**	
Growth X Income								-.111
N	214	214	214	214	214	214	214	214
Model F Statistics	11.961** *	11.418** *	10.102***	10.101** *	10.741** *	10.60** *	10.90** *	10.18** *
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.289	.308	.308	.308	.322	.319	.325	.310
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.265	.281	.278	.278	.292	.289	.295	.280
R <sup>2</sup> Change		.019	.000	.000	.016	-.003	.006	-.015

\*\*\* P<0.01, \*\* P<0.05,

Figure 1: Variables Predicted to Moderate the Relationship Between the Desire For Individual Growth and Intent to Study Abroad among Gen Y Students

