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The Impact of Study Abroad on Multicultural Competency Among Student Affairs Graduate Students

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The Impact of Study Abroad on Multicultural Competency
Among Student Affairs Graduate Students

Matthew Nam Musser

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Research has demonstrated the importance of multicultural competency for student affairs practitioners and their ability to effectively serve students (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). However, there has been little research into the various programs, especially study abroad, designed to impact multicultural competency among student affairs practitioners. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact that a short-term study abroad experience had on student affairs graduate students' multicultural competency. The study involved quantitative survey research methods involving 90 former graduate students who participated in the experience between the years 1999-2010 and who were still active in the profession. Participants completed a survey designed to measure multicultural competence and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results from the data suggest that a short term study abroad program can impact multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills. Study abroad and other high impact experiences need to be more widely used in student affairs graduate preparation programs to better prepare practitioners for their work with diverse student populations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

This study addressed the lack of research focused on study abroad experiences in student affairs graduate preparation programs and their impact on multicultural competency. Since the turn of the 20th century higher education has seen a dramatic rise in the enrollment of students from diverse backgrounds (Harpe & Quaye, 2009). If student affairs practitioners are to be prepared to serve a more diverse student body, a greater emphasis on multicultural competency is needed in student affairs graduate preparation programs (Altbach, 2005a; Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, & Salas 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Past studies have focused on the initiatives and need for colleges to address the issues surrounding an increasingly diverse student body (Castelanos et al., 2007; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Kuk, Cobb, Forrest, 2007; Mueller & Pope, 2003). However, little research has examined the role of graduate preparation programs in developing multicultural competence, specifically graduate study abroad experiences and their effectiveness in preparing student affairs practitioners to serve diverse campuses (Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2007; Krishnamurthi, 2003; MacDonald & Bernardo, 2005).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has compiled standards upon which graduate programs in student affairs should be modeled. One of the specific areas that the CAS Standards emphasizes is that of “Diversity, Equity and Access” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). And while research has demonstrated that study abroad programs are “high impact” practices for developing undergraduate students multicultural competency, very few investigations have been conducted to explore the degree to which this is occurring in graduate preparation programs (Reynolds-

Case, 2013; Ritz, 2011; Wright, & Larsen, 2012). The CAS Standards, as well as the learning outcomes set forth by the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the College Student Educators International (ACPA), all identify the need for student affairs practitioners to be multiculturally competent (NASPA & ACPA, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary for research to be conducted that examines the effectiveness of study abroad experiences in student affairs graduate preparation programs.

Importance of the Problem and Rationale for the Study

The role of a student affairs practitioner is to help students develop holistically, which means not only educating them for the work force but also developing their social, intellectual, and personal skills, among others, so that they are prepared to function in the world (American Council on Education, 1936; Williameaton, 2014; Wilson, & Wolverton, 2011). Student affairs practitioners must be prepared to address the needs of students in multiple areas and that is why they must be prepared to facilitate their development in areas such as, “(1) campus climate, (2) culturally inclusive environmental norms, (3) overwhelming Whiteness, (4) racial/ethnic organizations, (5) academic preparation, and (6) utilization of campus support services” (Hawkins & Larabee in Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 181). What is more, of the seven core competencies Pope and Reynolds argue that, “it is also vital that multicultural competencies be integrated into the other six core competencies” (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004, p. 9). Mueller and Pope (2001) have noted that there is a distinct lack of research into student affairs professionals and multicultural competency and as such it is critical that research into multicultural initiatives in higher education graduate programs be conducted. When student affairs practitioners are successful in their roles the result is that students are more likely to

succeed in college, persist to graduation, and are more holistically prepared to enter the working world both professionally and socially (Drake, 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

As the need for multiculturally competent student affairs practitioners increases it has become more apparent that as a profession student affairs needs to better understand this phenomenon and better prepare future practitioners (Stier, 2006). One of the fundamental documents for student affairs, “Learning Reconsidered”, emphasizes the importance of teaching student affairs practitioners to be multicultural competent (NASPA & ACPA, 2004), but the research on programs that prepare student affairs practitioners has been scarce at best. Without assessment of multicultural initiatives there will continue to be a trial-and-error approach for attempting to meet the learning outcomes of both the CAS Standards and documents such as “Learning Reconsidered.” What’s more, between the years of 1976 and 2011,

The percentage of Hispanic students rose from 4 percent to 14 percent, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2 percent to 6 percent, the percentage of Black students rose from 10 percent to 15 percent, and the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students rose from 0.7 to 0.9 percent. During the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 84 percent to 61 percent. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 1).

While these numbers are proportionate to a total enrollment increase of 11% between the years of 2001-2011, there is little doubt that higher education has seen an increase in diversity (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Even in states such as California, Texas, and Florida, that banned affirmative action scholarships, the trend of increasing diversity has been maintained throughout the last decade (Colburn, Young, & Yellen, 2008). There was, however a drop in enrollment for African-Americans and Hispanics of between 1-5%. However, increases in other

minorities, such as Asian Americans of over 10%, kept these states with the national average of increased diversity (Colburn et al., 2008).

Higher education hasn't just diversified from domestic growth but has seen a marked increase in the number of international students. In the 2014 Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange it was noted that there were 66,408 more international students than in 2012/13 (Open Doors). While international students still only account for approximately 4% of all enrolled undergraduate students, there doesn't seem to be an end to the increasing number of international students and predictions don't suggest this trend to slow down even with a slower global economy (Ngo & Lumadue, 2014; Open Doors, 2014). Both the increase in overall diversity in U.S. higher education and the increase in international students speak to the necessity for student affairs practitioners to be more multiculturally competent. As campuses continue to diversify, if student affairs practitioners aren't more culturally competent they will be less effective in working with one of the largest growing sub-groups on their own campus. And as Krishnamurithi (2003) states, "As institutions engage in initiatives to promote multiculturalism and diversity, it becomes crucial to assess and evaluate the quality and success of the initiatives" (p. 275). Therefore, it's not only important for institutions to create programs aimed at increasing their students multicultural competency but they need to actively assess the effectiveness of these programs, and that is why further research into whether study abroad is an effective means of increasing multicultural competency is warranted.

Background of Problem

The history of higher education is one that shifted from exclusivity to striving for inclusivity and as a result of that process student affairs practitioners need to be better prepared to work with a diverse student population. When American higher education began with the

founding of Harvard College in 1636 it was almost entirely dominated by White Protestant males, which established early on a stratification of higher education (Altbach 2005a; Altbach, 2005b). In 1862 the first Morrill Act was passed that established land-grant colleges focused on a more practical education and this was soon followed by with the second Morrill Act of 1890 (Schuh et al., 2011). These two acts marked an opening of access to higher education and a balancing of the stratification that had been established back in the late 1600s. However, it wasn't until after the Second World War that higher education saw one of its greatest expansions (Altbach, 2005b). This was in part the result of the GI Bill, which offered higher education to returning veterans (Schuh et al., 2011). The GI Bill, along with other social movements at the time, pushed the issue of access to higher education into the forefront, and in response community colleges, technical colleges, historically black colleges and universities, and other specialized schools established by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 further expanded and other new institutional types were established during the mid-twentieth century (Altbach, 2005a). As a result of greater access to higher education for people from more diverse socio-economic and racial/ethnic backgrounds, it has become imperative that universities be more prepared to meet the needs of these increasingly diverse students.

From the colonial period up until the mid 1800s higher education's primary focus was intellectual and moral development and its duty was one of *in loco parentis*, which meant faculty and staff at the institution served 'in place of parents' (Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011; Thomas, 1991). In reaction to the belief that colleges and universities should act in place of their student's parents strict rules and boundaries were often set for students (Thomas, 1991). However, toward the end of the 20th century the idea of *in loco parentis* was challenged by students forcing colleges and universities roles to change to a focus on treating students as adults and assisting in

their education and holistic development (American Council on Education, 1937; Schuh et al., 2011; Thomas, 1991). For student affairs practitioners this shift marked a new era where practitioners were expected to assist students with not only their education in and out of the classroom but offer counseling, advising, and other forms of support services. As a result, student affairs emerged as a profession in the late 19th century and was defined by the Student Personnel Point of View, which was published in 1937 and updated in 1949 (American Council on Education). This document outlined the profession of student affairs and how its practitioners are public servants that serve their institutions and attempt to help college students develop holistically (American Council on Education, 1937). In order to achieve this the American Council on Education outlined three objectives for student affairs practitioners to work towards,

1. Interpreting institutional objectives and opportunities to prospective students, to their parents, and to high school faculties;
2. Selecting students who seem, after study, to be able to achieve in relation to the college offerings and requirements;
3. Orienting students to the many phases of their college lives through a carefully designed program that involves such methods and experiences as personnel records, tests, group instruction, counseling, and group life (1937, p. 127).

The Student Personnel Point of View posits that it is the job of student affairs practitioners to help develop the whole student, which includes helping them mature as individuals, and to socialize and prepare them for their future (American Council on Education, 1937). It was in large part because of the Student Personnel Point of View that student affairs became more focused on the holistic development of college students and thus created the need for student affairs practitioners to be more than just administrators.

Developing the whole student became the focus of one of the foundational theories developed to guide student affairs practitioners work, the Student Involvement theory by Alexander Astin (1984). The focus of student affairs has been to connect with students and get them involved in their institution because the level of involvement can be related to their ability to be successful and graduate (Astin, 1984). In order to achieve these means student affairs practitioners have been encouraged to work in collaboration with academic affairs (Boyer, 1996; Williameaton, 2014). Because student affairs practitioners have played such an integral role in their institutions and their students lives, as colleges and universities student bodies have diversified the necessity for student affairs practitioners to be more multiculturally competent has grown.

By helping students socialize, and adjust to the academic rigor of higher education student affairs practitioners are also playing an integral role in ensuring that students persist through their college career. This idea was encapsulated into another developmental theory for retention developed by Tinto. Tinto's (1975) theory explains that in a college student's first year in college it is crucial that they are integrated socially and academically into the university if they are to be successful. Tinto explains that students who are not engaged with their academics and do not receive support are the ones that are most likely to drop out. Tinto's work became the focus of much research into retention. In a study conducted by Drew (1990), it was determined that programs and services provided by student affairs practitioners, such as freshman orientation and seminar courses, have a positive relationship to higher retention rates from the freshman to sophomore year. In a more recent study conducted by Woosley and Shepler (2011), first generation college student's and retention rates were examined and it was concluded that student affairs practitioners can have a positive impact on first year retention rates through student

services that target student integration into the campus. The research of Drew (1990) and Woosely and Shepler (2011), provide validation to Tinto's (1975) theory of retention and suggest that student affairs practitioners play a crucial role in the retention of both first year and upper-class students.

Statement of Purpose

Due to the increasing diversity of college students and the need for student affairs practitioners to be multiculturally competent it's imperative that research be conducted into the ways in which multicultural competence might be facilitated among students in a Masters level graduate preparation program. The purpose of this descriptive study is to examine the impact that a study abroad experience had on graduate students multicultural competency as it pertains to student affairs.

Research Question

This study is guided by the following research question:

1. To what degree does a graduate level study abroad experience impact a student affairs practitioner's perception of his or her own multicultural competence?

Design, Data Collection, and Analysis

A survey research design was employed using a 46 item questionnaire designed by the researcher, which is based on Pope and Reynolds' (2004) construct of multicultural competence. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The sample consisted of all students who participated in a two-week study abroad experience in Mexico during 1999-2010 and are now working in student affairs (n= 109).

Definition of Terms

Multicultural competency - Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004) define multicultural competency as, “the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaningful, relevant, and productive ways” (p. 13).

Multicultural awareness – “Multicultural Awareness constitutes those values, attitudes, and assumptions essential to working with students who are culturally different from a particular student affairs professional” (Pope et al., 2004, p. 14).

Multicultural knowledge – “Multicultural Knowledge consists of the content knowledge about various cultural groups that is typically not taught in many preparation programs” (Pope et al., 2004, p. 14-15).

Multicultural skills – “Multicultural skills consist of those behaviors that allow us to effectively apply the multicultural awareness and knowledge we have internalized” (Pope et al., 2004, p. 14-15).

Delimitations of the Study

The researchers chose to only focus on one institution, a mid-sized master’s university in the Mid-West United States. Furthermore, only student affairs graduate students who participated in a study abroad experience and who were still active in the field were included in the target population. And of those, only students participating in a study abroad experience in Mexico during 1999-2010 (n=90) were invited to participate in this study. The study abroad experience that was studied was also delimited to a two-week experience, and was assessed using primarily quantitative datum with the qualitative datum as a means to interpret quantitative datum.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study included the number of participants that returned surveys (50%) and the quality of feedback given, which may have been caused by respondent fatigue. A further limitation of the study was that although study abroad experiences were examined broadly, particular aspects of those experiences that facilitate multicultural competence were not included or addressed.

Organization of Thesis

In Chapter 2 the theoretical framework and a review of all relevant research and literature, are expanded upon. Chapter 3 details the research design, target population, and instrumentation used. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study and includes a summary of data collected, both quantitative and qualitative. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings from Chapter 4, their importance, and implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter two is a review of the relevant literature on multicultural competence among student affairs professionals. The chapter begins with a review of a theoretical framework used to help understand the construct of multicultural competence. This chapter also examines the literature on graduate preparation of student affairs practitioners, multiculturalism and its impact on student affairs practitioners, and study abroad as a high impact practice.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework for this study is based on the work of Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004). Pope et al. (2004) developed a theory of multicultural competence that also serves as one of the core competencies student affairs practitioners are expected to gain throughout their professional preparation and professional careers (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). Pope et al. note that, “multicultural competency may be defined as the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaningful, relevant, and productive ways” (p. 13). The importance of multicultural competency is that it allows student affairs practitioners to better serve a diverse student body and create a safer more affirming environment for all students (Pope et al., 2004).

The three domains of multicultural competence that Pope et al. identified are multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills (2004). Pope et al. state that,

Multicultural awareness constitutes those values, attitudes, and assumptions essential to working with students who are culturally different from a particular student affairs professional...multicultural knowledge consists of the content knowledge about various cultural groups that is typically not taught in many preparation programs...multicultural

skills consist of those behaviors that allow us to effectively apply the multicultural awareness and knowledge we have internalized (Pope et al., 2004, p. 14-15).

Multicultural awareness is characterized by the recognition that there are cultural differences between one's self and others, and that those cultural differences may result in biases (Pope et al., 2004). For example, students can develop multicultural awareness through class discussions of race and ethnicity and discussions about power, privilege and oppression. After becoming aware of multicultural differences, multicultural knowledge is gained through the search for greater cultural competency, which can be acquired through reading, interaction, and other various means (Pope et al., 2004). In graduate preparation programs, developing multicultural knowledge also occurs as students complete their traditional coursework, interact with diverse others, and delve deeply into student development theory. Finally, multicultural skill is being able to take cultural knowledge and apply the theory to practice when working with students from different cultures, which is the most difficult domain to achieve because it takes more time to develop and active interaction with diverse populations to achieve (Pope et al., 2004). Field experiences, graduate assistantships, interacting with diverse peers, supervisors, and faculty, as well as cultural immersion experiences, including study abroad, are mechanisms for helping students develop multicultural skill. Furthermore, Pope et al. (2004), created a self-assessment for determining if a student affairs practitioner has multicultural competency based on the three areas of awareness, knowledge and skills. Pope et al., describe the attributes of a multiculturally competent student affairs practitioner in this assessment, which includes areas such as,

A willingness to self-examine and, when necessary, challenge and change their own values, worldview, assumptions, and biases...Knowledge about the ways that cultural

differences affect verbal and nonverbal communication...Ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues (2004, p.18-19).

Pope et al. (2004), go on to detail how multicultural competency is crucial for student affairs practitioners because it helps them work more effectively with an increasingly diverse student body. Multicultural competency assists student affairs practitioners in becoming more competent advocates and advisors for the students they serve, the faculty and staff they collaborate with, as well as diverse members of the broader community and as such is a vital component to student affairs graduate preparation (Pope et al., 2004).

Synthesis of Research Literature

Graduate Preparation in Student Affairs

As enrollment and diversity at colleges and universities increased so has the need for student affairs practitioners to be trained, and in 1986 the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education set forth a set of competencies to help guide student affairs graduate programs (McEwen & Talbot, 1998; Young & Janosik, 2007). These competencies include: Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application, cognitive complexity, intrapersonal development, interpersonal competence, humanitarianism and civic engagement, and practical competence (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). Although the CAS Standards aren't the only measure for gauging student affairs graduate preparation they are one of the most widely accepted and used methods and have been the focus of some research to determine whether or not graduate preparation programs are properly preparing students for the world of student affairs.

In a study conducted by Young and Janosik (2007) that examined how prepared graduate students were based on the CAS Standards it was reported that in general graduate preparation

programs were graduating students with the knowledge and training that met the CAS Standards. Young and Janosik (2007) further noted that students in CAS compliant programs were better prepared than students in non-CAS compliant programs. Kuk and Banning (2009) came to a similar conclusion using a different set of defined competencies to assess graduate programs with, and further found that almost across the board student affairs master's programs were succeeding in adequately equipping students for entry-level student affairs positions. All of this research demonstrates the importance of graduate students gaining certain competencies throughout their graduate experiences. In the case of Young and Janosik's study (2007), it was a self-assessment of multicultural competency that did not explicitly state what student experiences or preparation the participants felt helped them to be multiculturally competent. However, Kuk and Banning's study (2009) was longitudinal and as part of the study students were required to create a portfolio and keep track of experiences that fulfilled the competencies outlined by the CAS Standards, including those that helped them become multiculturally competent. What Kuk and Banning discovered was that students reported that the portfolio helped them be more conscious of the competencies they were learning and seek out experiences in areas that they did not feel were sufficient.

However, not all research has reported the same results. In contrast, Arellano and Martinez (2009) conducted a study of competencies utilizing higher education policy analysts and faculty that had between 6-9 years experience teaching in student affairs masters and doctoral programs. Arellano and Martinez (2009) found that their analysts perceived less preparation from master's programs in crucial competencies in student affairs. One of the particular areas that Arellano and Martinez (2009) reported where master's level students were not gaining satisfactory competency in was in the area of Multiculturalism. What's more, Kuk,

Cobb and Forrest (2007) found that there was a significant difference in what competencies student affairs graduate faculty believed were important and what mid-level student affairs administrators believed to be most important for entry-level positions. This noted disconnect leads to the possibility that some of the key competencies that professionals believe need to be taught may not be explicitly included in graduate courses and the curriculum (Kuk et al., 2007).

In a more recent study, Herdlein, Kline, Boquard, and Haddad (2010) confirmed previous studies about faculty perceptions of what competencies are important for master's level students to gain and suggested that part of the reason master's level students may not be gaining certain competencies is that standard curricula doesn't have a high enough impact on students. Waple (2006) came to similar conclusions in another study of the assessment of skills that entry-level professionals had versus those believed most important by their supervisors. Of the 28 skills that were examined, multicultural knowledge and skill was ranked number 8 by professionals as important to entry level positions but was ranked in the bottom 10 by students as being gained (Waple, 2006). Although the research on graduate preparation is conflicted what stands out most notably is that it has been of the utmost importance to evaluate the competencies gained throughout a graduate preparation program and to ensure that programs are preparing their students for entry-level positions. This means that the core competencies, whether they are the CAS Standards, or an amalgamation of what professionals in the field believe are most important, should be one of the focal points of student affairs graduate preparation, and this includes multicultural competency.

Multiculturalism and its Impact on Student Affairs Practitioners

One of the key competencies that the CAS Standards and other professional standards note as important for graduate preparation is that of multiculturalism. However, this is a

competency that isn't always necessarily being met. In a study conducted by Kelly and Gayles (2010) it was reported that many graduate students are resistant to learning about multiculturalism in a classroom setting. Kelly and Gayles (2010) reasoned that one of the main reasons for the resistance to discussions surrounding multicultural competency is that students feel there is too much emphasis placed on race, that the conversations are poorly facilitated, and that persons of color are often asked to speak on behalf of their entire race. In order to address these concerns, conversations need to be better facilitated and perhaps different formats for these classes need to be adopted, such as study abroad as a gateway to discussing multiculturalism.

Another problem with multicultural competency for student affairs graduate students is that not all programs require a diversity course, as pointed out by Gayles and Kelly (2007). Gayles and Kelly (2007) did however note that in programs where a diversity course wasn't required students often sought one out, leading again to the importance of gaining multicultural competency. What's more, Gayles and Kelly (2007) noted that students found it more impactful when discussions of multiculturalism incorporated theory to practice. These observations further strengthen the idea that multicultural training through a study abroad program could be more impactful than simply having a course on multiculturalism.

King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) studied graduate students self-assessment of their own multicultural competency gained throughout their programs and discovered that students felt as though they had greater skills and awareness than knowledge. King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) posit that this is because students are aware of how much there is to know about a culture and that is why they might feel as though they have less multicultural knowledge. At the same time Flowers (2003) investigated the importance of student affairs graduate preparation programs having a diversity course and found that it is imperative that graduate preparation

programs for student affairs include some form of diversity training, whether that's a course or through professional development opportunities, and suggested that all programs should be looking for a ways to increase their students multicultural competency.

Johnson III and Rivera further confirmed the results of these earlier studies in 2007 when they conducted a similar assessment of graduate programs multicultural competency preparation. Johnson III and Rivera (2007) also suggested that programs should incorporate diversity within their courses but offer a more intensive course that looked at the socio-economic status of different races. In both cases these studies point to the fact that some graduate students feel as though they are lacking in a more intimate knowledge of multiculturalism, again something that could be gained through study abroad and immersion in another culture.

In order to better facilitate conversations of race and ethnicity, there has been a push for greater diversity training and professional development so that student affairs professionals are more competent when dealing with multicultural issues. In many cases it has been suggested that professional development can supplement the curriculum in terms of the development of multicultural competency in student affairs practitioners (Adams, 2007). However, further research has shown that diversity trainings are more impactful with student affairs practitioners that have previously had multicultural discussions and experiences during their graduate work (Miles, Hu & Dotson, 2013; Obear & Martinez, 2013).

Multicultural competency has been the focus of much research in student affairs and it is clear that student affairs programs need to find a way to better incorporate diversity and multicultural topics within their curricula. One of the ways that this can be achieved is through study abroad experiences, which offer a more impactful way to hold discussions where students gain multicultural competency (Talbani, 2013). However, research has indicated a few other

impactful practices for increasing student's undergraduate and graduate multicultural competency. Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen and Meadows (2014), recently examined how graduate students gained intercultural competence during their graduate classes. What Dimitrov et al. (2014), found was that if graduate students gained multicultural awareness then they were more likely to seek out knowledge and experiences that would increase their skills as well. As a result of this, Dimitrov et al., recommended that the most important aspect of developing graduate student's multicultural competency was to integrate discussions and trainings that made students aware of multicultural issues and that students would respond by seeking out knowledge and skills.

One of the reasons trainings and discussions on multicultural topics can have such a positive impact on student's multicultural competency is that it provides a safe, guided environment to openly discuss these topics. In a study conducted by Lebedeva, Makarova and Tatrko (2013), it was reported that students who participated in intercultural competence and tolerance training programs felt less anxiety at the prospect of working with students from different ethnic groups.

While it may be true that multicultural competency trainings and discussions in class can provide a positive enough impact on student's multicultural competency research has also indicated that the ethnic diversity of the student's participating in these trainings or discussions may have an impact on their effectiveness (Kennedy, Wheeler, & Bennett, 2014). Kennedy, Wheeler and Bennett (2014) examined the impact that group composition had on the effectiveness of multicultural discussions and trainings and found that groups that had more diversity reported greater multicultural gains. Kennedy et al., encouraged researchers to examine the impact that group diversity had on multicultural discussions and trainings. For this reason

although discussions or trainings may be successfully increasing student's multicultural competency experiences, experiences such as cultural immersion or study abroad may have a greater impact on student's multicultural competency. And to this point, in a study conducted by Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, and Bonham (2011), the researchers examined the impact that interactions with a different ethnic group had on counseling graduate student's multicultural competency and found that repeated and prolonged interactions with another ethnic group had the greatest impact on their multicultural competency.

Although no research has specifically examined the impact that study abroad has on student affairs graduate student's multicultural competency, the bulk of research that examined multicultural competency did utilize the theoretical framework of Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller. Research into multicultural competency examined the areas of awareness, knowledge, and skills, in order to assess multicultural competency, which validate the utility of Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller's theory and instrument.

Study Abroad as a High Impact Practice

One of the possible ways that student affairs graduate students can gain multicultural competency in the areas of awareness, knowledge, and skills, is through study abroad, which immerses students in another culture and provides a setting for faculty and students to engage in meaningful conversations regarding multicultural topics. In a study conducted by Watson, Siska and Wolfel (2013), that examined 3rd and 4th year undergraduate students pre- and post-cultural competencies, particularly their language understandings, it was discovered that study abroad experiences had a statistically significant impact on their understanding of another culture and its language. But these gains aren't just limited to a greater understanding of another culture's language.

In another study conducted by Kitsantas (2004) that examined the impact of study abroad on roughly 230 undergraduate students, it was reported that study abroad experiences had a significant impact on student's cross-cultural skills and global understanding. What's more Kitsantas (2004) found that even though different study abroad experiences and students from different majors were examined study abroad experiences had a significant impact on these student's multicultural competency. These results are important because cross-cultural skills and global understanding are terms similar to Pope et al.'s constructs of multicultural skill and knowledge (2004). Therefore, Kitsantas' study demonstrates the significance that study abroad experiences can have on two of the three components of multicultural competency. In a similar but more recent study conducted by Coers, Rodriguez, Roberts, Emerson, and Barrick (2013), the impact of study abroad experiences were examined and the authors found that study abroad also had a significant impact on students actual and perceived cultural knowledge. Although not directly using the terms defined by Pope et al., this study suggests that study abroad can have an impact on student's multicultural knowledge. The research of Coers et al., combined with Kitsantas', creates a more significant argument that study abroad experiences can have a positive impact on the three areas defined by Pope et al., of multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skill, and thus multicultural competency.

One of the major concerns regarding study abroad is that short-term experiences may not be enough time to have a significant impact on a student's cultural competency. However, in a study conducted by Reynolds-Case (2013) that assessed the impact of a four-week study abroad experience on its ten participants by conducting pre- and post-assessment of their multicultural competence, it was determined that the length of a study abroad experience didn't have a significant impact on the amount of cultural competency gained from that experience. What's

more, Reynolds-Case (2013) found that longer experiences didn't necessarily equate to students being more willing to work with others from different cultures, or show a significant increase in cultural salience. Reynolds-Case (2013) attributed these results to the fact that while study abroad may increase multicultural knowledge and awareness, the impact on skills is more influenced by course work and the curriculum associated with these experiences. The significance of Reynolds-Case's study is that while study abroad experiences can be impactful, with less significance placed on the length of the experience, there needs to be impactful curriculum that facilitates the experience. Reynolds-Case's research was further validated by the research of Hamad and Lee (2013) who studied whether or not a four-week study abroad experience was long enough to have a significant impact on student's cross-cultural adaptation. Hamad and Lee (2013) conducted a post-assessment of 78 undergraduate and graduate students who participated in short-term study abroad experiences and found that despite four-weeks seemingly being a short amount of time the exposure to another culture was in fact impactful enough to begin to impact students cross-cultural adaptation, or their multicultural knowledge and awareness.

All of the research surrounding study abroad experiences; even those shorter than four-weeks, appear to suggest an impact on student's multicultural knowledge, awareness, and to a lesser extent on skill. Thus it can be inferred that study abroad experiences can have a significant impact on a student's sense of multicultural competency.

Conclusion

The research into student affairs and study abroad experiences is clear: students need to gain multicultural competency to be effective practitioners and study abroad experiences can be an impactful way to gain multicultural competency (Council for the Advancement of Standards

in Higher Education, 2012; Kelly & Gayles, 2010; Watson et al., 2013). Unfortunately, no studies exist that explore the degree to which study abroad impacts students multicultural competence who are enrolled in a masters level student affairs program.

This study views multicultural competency through the lens of Pope et al., (2004) and the CAS Standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012) in order to examine the impact that a study abroad experience had on graduate students multicultural competency as it pertains to student affairs. The instrument created for this study utilized Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller's (2004) constructs of multicultural awareness, knowledge and skill. It further utilizes student populations similar to other research conducted into cultural competency (Coers et al., 2013; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Reynolds-Case, 2013). What makes this study unique is that it specifically ties these two separate topics of research, student affairs competencies and graduate student study abroad experiences, and examines the impact that study abroad has on student affairs graduate student's multicultural competency.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive study is to examine the impact that a study abroad experience had on graduate students multicultural competency as it pertains to student affairs.

This study was guided by the following research question:

1. To what degree does a graduate level study abroad experience impact a student affairs practitioner's perception of their own multicultural competence?

The researcher hypothesized that participating in a short-term graduate level study abroad experience has an impact on student affairs practitioners' sense of multicultural competence.

The null hypothesis of the study is that participating in a short-term graduate level study abroad experience has no negative impact on a student affairs practitioner's sense of multicultural competence. This chapter describes the methodology used in this study to gather and analyze the datum as it relates to the impact of a study abroad experiences impact on student affairs graduate students multicultural competence.

Participants

The target population for this study was all graduate students who participated in a graduate level study abroad experience that ran from 1999-2010 at Grand Valley State University. Approximately 10-15 students participated in the program each year with total participation estimated at n=120. Only those graduates who participated in the program in the Country of Mexico and who were still employed in the field of student affairs were invited to participate (n=90). The researcher, in consultation with his faculty advisor, identified this sample of students from a list of student participants who participated in the program and then compared that list to a database of alumni who were still in the field of student affairs.

Participants were invited to complete a survey at the beginning of December 2014 and into January 2015. A copy of the letter of invitation to participate in the study is included in Appendix A.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized in this study was adapted from a self-assessment rubric created by Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004) to help student affairs practitioners assess their multicultural competence in the three domains of awareness, knowledge and skill. Questions were developed for each of the three domains of multicultural competence; 12 questions focused on awareness, 21 questions focused on knowledge, and 10 questions focused on skill. Open-ended questions were also included at the end of each of the three sections, which asked participants if there were any particular experiences that impacted their multicultural awareness, knowledge, or skill. While the open-ended questions were secondary to the quantitative data gathered they were meant to inform the assessment of that data. A Likert scale was used to indicate the perceptions of the participants regarding the impact that the study abroad experience in Mexico had on participants. A rank of 5 denoted Strongly Agree, a 4 for Agree, a 3 for Neither Agree nor Disagree, a 2 for Disagree, and a 1 for Strongly Disagree.

The survey was created by the principal researcher, reviewed by the thesis advisor, thesis committee, and then by Dr. Mueller who co-authored the research on which the instrument was based. Furthermore, this study was pilot tested with nine current student affairs graduate students who had participated in a similar experience in a different culturally diverse location during the summer of 2014. The results from the pilot test assisted in creating clarity in the survey questions before administering the final survey and were also analyzed for viability and utility for the intended study. Based on the results of the pilot test and the feedback of Dr.

Mueller and the researcher's thesis committee, the survey was slightly modified and then determined to be appropriate and have utility in terms of its' intended use for this study. A copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Participants were sent an email in December 2014, requesting their participation in the study and provided with a link to the survey on surveymonkey.com. The email included information regarding the nature of the study, the time that the questionnaire would take to complete, the IRB approval number, information about the definition used for multicultural competence, awareness, knowledge, and skill, and contact information for the principal researcher and thesis advisor. A copy of the IRB approval can be found in appendix C. Follow-up emails were sent out two weeks after the initial request and again two weeks after that. All emails, returned surveys and data were collected by the university's statistical consulting center, to ensure anonymity of the participants and provide a summary of both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Data Analysis

Datum from the survey was exported from Survey Monkey into excel and then coded to be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. First, each question was analyzed separately and descriptive statistics were reported for each question in each of the three domains. Each of the three sections of the survey, which measured one of the three domains of multicultural competency, were evaluated individually and a Chronbach's Alpha statistic was used to determine if they were a valid measure of that domain. A Chronbach's alpha is a statistical measure for the internal consistency of a set of items, in this case the questions that make up one of the three multicultural domains. Confidence intervals for

each of the three domains were also reported to determine if the three domains could be collectively representative of a change in multicultural competency as a whole. Scatter plot graphs and other visual representations of the data were also generated to further analyze the data. Results from these data are reported in chapter four.

Summary

This study was conducted to assess the perceived impact of a study abroad experience on student affairs graduate student's multicultural competence. The questionnaire used was designed based on the research of Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller, who had created a self-assessment tool of multicultural competence based on the three domains of awareness, knowledge, and skill (2004). Analysis of the data aimed to determine if student affairs graduate students perceived a study abroad experience to have a positive impact on their multicultural competence.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This section reports the findings of the Multicultural Competency Survey. The chapter starts with a summary of the descriptive statistics and responses to questions on the survey from participants in each of the three domains of multicultural competence. Finally, other research findings, including the qualitative data, are presented followed by a summary of the analysis.

Context

90 former graduate students were invited to participate in the survey, and of the 90 invited 44 responded (49%). Of the 44 participants 33% were male and 66% were female, and participants identified working in all of the functional areas of student affairs identified with the exception of Campus Recreation. The demographic data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

<i>Demographic Information</i>		
Gender	Responses	
Male	14 (33%)	
Female	28 (67%)	
Trans	0	
Prefer not to disclose	0	
Functional Area	Yes	No
Housing and Res. Life	24 (69%)	11 (31%)
Student Life	18 (55%)	15 (45%)
Academic Advising	20 (69%)	9 (31%)
Financial Aid	3 (12%)	23 (88%)
Admissions	8 (29%)	20 (71%)
Counseling	5 (19%)	22 (81%)
Career Counseling	7 (27%)	19 (73%)
Academic Affairs	13 (48%)	14 (52%)
Campus Rec.	0	24 (100%)
Student Affairs Admin.	12 (41%)	17 (59%)
Multicultural Affairs	7 (26%)	20 (74%)
Women's Center	2 (8%)	23 (92%)
LGBT Center	3 (12%)	22 (88%)

Findings

The analysis of data collected are reported for the three domains of multicultural competency, awareness, knowledge and skill. Each of the three domains were also analyzed by examining their Chronbach's Alpha to determine the validity of each measure. Then the three domains confidence intervals were examined to determine if the three domains could be representative of an impact on multicultural competency as a whole. For the purposes of this study demographic data, such as gender and work history were requested but they were not part of the hypothesis and as such had no bearing on the results of this research. However they were collected for future research studies.

Multicultural Awareness

Table Two summarizes the 12 questions regarding multicultural awareness. Data in this category ranges from 73% to 98% for agree to strongly agree, a clear indication that participants felt that the study abroad experience impacted their multicultural awareness. The highest responses came from questions such as "Willingness to self-examine my own values, worldview and assumptions," (98% agree or strongly agree) "Belief that learning about others who are culturally different is necessary and rewarding," (96% agree or strongly agree) and "Acceptance of other world views" (96% agree or strongly agree). The lowest responses were to the statements "Openness to change and belief that change is necessary and positive" (73% agree or strongly agree), "Willingness to acknowledge that as an individual I do not have all the answers" (73% agree or strongly agree), and "Awareness of my own cultural heritage and how it affects my worldview, values, and assumptions" (77% agree or strongly agree).

Table Two

<i>Multicultural Awareness</i>					
Questions	S.D.	Disagree	Neither A. or D.	Agree	S. A.
Belief that learning about others who are culturally different is necessary and rewarding	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	13 (30%)	29 (65%)
Willingness to take risks and see them as necessary and important for personal and professional growth	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	14 (32%)	27 (61%)
Personal commitment to justice, social change, and combating oppression	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	6 (15%)	18 (41%)	18 (41%)
Belief in the value and significance of an individual's cultural heritage and worldview as a starting place for understanding others who are culturally different	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	11 (25%)	30 (68%)
Willingness to self-examine and when necessary, challenge and change my own values, worldview, assumptions and biases	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	17 (38%)	26 (60%)
Openness to change, and belief that change is necessary and positive	0 (%)	1 (2%)	11 (25%)	12 (28%)	20 (45%)
Acceptance of other worldviews	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	21 (27%)	21 (48%)
Willingness to acknowledge that, an individual, I do not have all the answers	0 (0%)	4 (9%)	8 (18%)	15 (34%)	17 (39%)
Belief that cultural differences do not have to interfere with effective communication or meaningful relationships	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (14%)	18 (41%)	20 (45%)
Awareness of my own cultural heritage and how it affects my worldview, values, and assumptions	0 (0%)	6 (14%)	4 (9%)	13 (30%)	21 (48%)
Awareness of my own behavior and its impact on others	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (11%)	18 (41%)	21 (48%)
Awareness of the interpersonal process that occurs within multicultural interactions	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	20 (46%)	22 (50%)

Of the 44 participants that responded to the questions in this section, 25 (56%) responded to the open-ended question regarding how their study abroad experience impacted their multicultural awareness. From the qualitative data for multicultural awareness the most impactful experiences seem to have been the interactions with the local community and native people. One participant

described volunteering at a convent and interacting with the sisters there and how that experience had such a powerful effect on her multicultural awareness and another student recounted how as a result of the experience, “I became more sensitive to people who do not speak the native language of a country.”

A Chronbach’s Alpha test was run on the set of multicultural awareness questions, which is used to determine the internal consistency of the set of questions and a Chronbach’s Alpha of greater than 0.70 indicates a high level of internal consistency. The Chronbach’s Alpha for the set of multicultural awareness questions was 0.91, which indicates that the set of questions can accurately measure multicultural awareness.

Multicultural Knowledge

Table Three summarizes the datum collected from the survey on multicultural knowledge. Responses to questions in this category ranged from 30% to 96% for agree or strongly agree indicating that participants in the study abroad experience perceived an impact on their multicultural knowledge. The strongest responses were to statements such as, “Knowledge about how language affects individuals and their experiences” (96% agreed or strongly agreed), and “Knowledge about the ways that cultural differences affect verbal and non-verbal communication” (93% agreed or strongly agreed). The weakest responses came from statements such as, “Knowledge about how sexual orientation affects individuals and their experiences” (30% agreed or strongly agreed) and “Knowledge about how disability and ability affect individuals and their experiences” (32% agreed or strongly agreed).

Table 3

<i>Multicultural Knowledge</i>					
Questions	S.D	Disagree	Neither A. or D.	Agree	S. A.
Knowledge of diverse cultures and oppressed groups	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	4 (9%)	21 (49%)	17 (40%)
Knowledge about how change occurs for individual values and behaviors	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	10 (23%)	19 (45%)	10 (23%)
Knowledge about the ways that cultural differences affects verbal and nonverbal communication	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	18 (42%)	23 (54%)
Knowledge about how gender affects individuals and their experiences	0 (0%)	7 (16%)	8 (19%)	19 (44%)	9 (21%)
Knowledge about how class affects individuals and their experiences	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	4 (9%)	18 (42%)	20 (47%)
Knowledge about how race affects individuals and their experiences	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	7 (16%)	23 (54%)	11 (26%)
Knowledge about how ethnicity affects individuals and their experiences	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	8 (19%)	22 (51%)	12 (28%)
Knowledge about how language affects individuals and their experiences	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	21 (49%)	21 (49%)
Knowledge about how nationality affects individuals and their experiences	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (14%)	20 (48%)	16 (38%)
Knowledge about how sexual orientation affects individuals and their experiences	4 (9%)	9 (21%)	17 (40%)	8 (19%)	5 (12%)
Knowledge about how age affects individuals and their experiences	2 (5%)	7 (16%)	10 (23%)	17 (40%)	7 (16%)
Knowledge about how religion affects individuals and their experiences	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	6 (14%)	22 (51%)	11 (26%)
Knowledge about how spirituality affects individuals and their experiences	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	10 (23%)	17 (40%)	9 (22%)
Knowledge about how disability and ability affect individuals and their experiences	2 (5%)	8 (19%)	19 (44%)	8 (19%)	6 (21%)
Knowledge about culturally appropriate resources and how to make referrals	1 (2%)	7 (16%)	14 (33%)	13 (30%)	8 (19%)
Knowledge about the nature of institutional oppression and power	2 (5%)	3 (7%)	7 (16%)	22 (51%)	9 (21%)
Knowledge about how the acculturation process for members of oppressed groups impact individuals, groups, intergroup relations, and society	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	12 (29%)	20 (48%)	9 (21%)
Knowledge about identity development models	1 (2%)	7 (16%)	11 (26%)	20 (47%)	4 (9%)

Knowledge about within-group differences and understanding of multiple identities and multiple oppressions	1 (2%)	6 (16%)	9 (21%)	20 (47%)	7 (16%)
Knowledge and understanding of internalized oppression and its impact on identity and self-esteem	2 (5%)	6 (14%)	8 (19%)	20 (47%)	7 (16%)
Knowledge about institutional barriers that limit access to and success in higher education	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	4 (9%)	20 (47%)	17 (40%)

Of the 43 participants that responded to this section, 15 responded to the open-ended question about how the study abroad experience impacted their multicultural knowledge. With regard to the qualitative datum participants reported having an overall positive impact to their multicultural knowledge. Of the 15 participants the over-arching theme was that it was the cultural immersion and historical learning that occurred on the trip that helped increase their understanding of Mexican culture.

Additionally the Chronbach’s Alpha for multicultural knowledge was tested and resulted in a 0.94, which suggests that this set of questions has a high internal consistency and is able to accurately measure multicultural knowledge.

Multicultural Skill

Table Four summarizes the datum collected from the survey for multicultural skill. Responses in this category ranged from 51% to 91% for agree to strongly agree suggesting that participants believe that their multicultural skill was impacted by the study abroad experience. The strongest responses were to statements such as, “Ability to empathize and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from myself” (93% agreed or strongly agreed), and “Ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues” (91% agreed or strongly agreed). The weakest responses were to statements such as, “Ability to make individual, group, and institutional multicultural interventions” (52% agreed or strongly agreed) and “Ability to

challenge and support individuals and systems around oppression issues in a manner that optimizes multicultural interventions” (59% agreed or strongly agreed).

Table Four

Answer Options	<i>Multicultural Skill</i>				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	26 (62%)	14 (34%)
Ability to assess the impact of cultural differences and communication and effectively communicate across those differences	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	28 (67%)	10 (24%)
Ability to empathize and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from myself	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	16 (38%)	25 (60%)
Ability to incorporate new learning and prior learning in new situations	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)	18 (43%)	18 (43%)
Ability to gain the trust and respect of individuals who are culturally different from myself	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	22 (52%)	16 (38%)
Ability to accurately assess my own multicultural skills, comfort level, growth, and development	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	23 (55%)	15 (36%)
Ability to differentiate among individual differences, cultural differences, and universal similarities	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	6 (14%)	22 (52%)	13 (31%)
Ability to challenge and support individuals and systems around oppression issues in a manner that optimizes multicultural interventions	0 (0%)	5 (12%)	11 (26%)	14 (33%)	12 (29%)
Ability to make individual, group, and institutional multicultural interventions	1 (2%)	7 (17%)	11 (26%)	13 (31%)	10 (24%)
Ability to use cultural knowledge and sensitivity to make more culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	7 (17%)	18 (43%)	14 (33%)

Of the 9 participants that responded to the open-ended question regarding how the experience impacted their multicultural skill two themes emerged. The first theme was that the participants reported that becoming more aware of how not speaking the native language can make

communication more difficult made them more sensitive to how quickly they spoke or how they interacted with students who didn't speak English as their primary language. The second major theme that emerged was that the participants reported being more sensitive to how cultural differences may impact the students they work with and thus they try to apply their international experiences in these situations.

As with the previous domains the Chronbach's Alpha was calculated for multicultural skill and was reported as 0.91, which indicates that the set of questions for multicultural skill contain a high internal consistency and are capable of measuring multicultural skill. Of the 42 participants that responded to the questions in this section 9 responded to the open-ended question regarding how the experience impacted their multicultural skill, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Confidence Interval

Confidence interval testing was conducted for the three domains of multicultural competency. Since answers of a 3 were neither agree nor disagree, a confidence interval of greater than 3 indicates a positive impact in that domain. The confidence interval testing can be seen in Table Five.

Table Five

<i>Confidence Interval Test 1</i>									
<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Std Error</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Lower 95% CL for Mean</i>	<i>Upper 95% CL for Mean</i>
Awareness	44	52.36	6.32	0.95	52.50	40.00	60.00	50.44	54.29
Knowledge	43	80.09	13.04	1.99	81.00	52.00	105.00	76.08	84.11
Skills	42	41.19	5.96	0.92	40.00	28.00	50.00	39.33	43.05

Calculating the mean of each domain and then dividing by 3 further tested the confidence interval, which normalizes the data since previously they contained varying numbers of

questions. If the three domains confidence intervals overlap that indicates that each domain was affected similarly and that no domain was statistically impacted greater than another. The normalized second confidence interval test can be seen in Table Six.

Table Six

<i>Confidence Interval Test 2</i>							
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Label</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Std Error</i>	<i>Lower 95% CL for Mean</i>	<i>Upper 95% CL for Mean</i>
A Standard	Awareness Score	44	0.0346	0.9919	0.1495	-0.2669	0.3362
K Standard	Knowledge Score	43	0.0016	0.9881	0.1507	-0.3024	0.3057
S Standard	Skills Score	42	-0.0000	1.0000	0.1543	-0.3116	0.3116

Because each of the confidence intervals overlap and have an upper bound of greater than 0.3 it can be stated that each domain had a positive overall impact and that no domain had a statistically greater impact than the others. Therefore, students were positively impacted in each of the domains as a result of their study abroad experience.

Correlation Testing

The three domains were also correlated to determine if they could statistically be correlated to each other, which was done by calculating the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. A correlation of -1 is equivalent to a perfect negative relationship, a +1 is equivalent to a perfect positive relationship and a 0 indicates that there is no correlation. Correlations between 0.6 and 0.8, as were achieved with this survey, indicate a moderately strong statistical correlation, which can be observed in Table Seven.

Table Seven

<i>Pearson Correlation Coefficients</i>			
<i>Number of Observations</i>			
	<i>Awareness</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>
<i>Awareness</i>	1.00	0.61	0.66
Awareness Score	44	43	42
<i>Knowledge</i>	0.61	1.00	0.72
Knowledge Score	43	43	42
<i>Skills</i>	0.66	0.72	1.00
Skills Score	42	42	42

Summary

The results of this multicultural competency survey were coded and analyzed using Chronbach's Alpha testing, descriptive statistics, confidence interval testing, and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient testing. The results indicate that each of the three sections of the survey were a reliable test for that domain of multicultural competency and that the three domains as a whole can be examined collectively to measure multicultural competency. Furthermore, the moderately significant results of each of the three sections indicate that the study abroad experience had an overall impact on these students' multicultural competency, including multicultural awareness, knowledge and skill. The significance and implications of these results and the open-ended questions are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary of Study

This study was conducted to address the lack of research into the impact of a study abroad experience on student affairs graduate students' multicultural competency. Multicultural competency is a core component of the core competencies that the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education sets forth, and multicultural competency has been widely accepted as a necessary skill that student affairs practitioners need to possess. However, the literature has paid little attention to assessing the means by which student affairs graduate students may gain multicultural competency. This study surveyed 44 former student affairs graduate students from one higher education institution in the Midwestern U.S. The purpose of this study was to determine if these students participation in a study abroad experience to Mexico between the years of 1990 and 2010 had a positive impact on their multicultural competency.

Each participant's multicultural competency was assessed using an instrument developed by the researcher, which focused on the three domains of multicultural competency developed by Dr.'s Pope, Reynolds and Mueller. The results of the survey were summarized into the three domains of multicultural competency, including awareness, knowledge and skill, and were examined both independently and then collectively. The results of this study identified that the study abroad experience had a moderate statistical significance on the participants' multicultural competence. This was indicated separately in each of the three domains and then the correlation testing indicated that the three collectively indicate that the participants' multicultural competency as a whole was positively impacted.

Conclusion

This study was guided by the research question “To what degree does a graduate level study abroad experience impact a student affairs practitioner’s perception of his or her own multicultural competence?” To this end, the results of this study indicate that study abroad experiences can have a moderately significant positive impact on student affairs practitioner’s perceptions of their own multicultural competency. The data suggest that student affairs practitioners didn’t only perceive gains to their multicultural awareness, knowledge, or skill, but for all three domains that encompass multicultural competency as constructed by Pope et al. (2004). What’s more, there was no significant difference between the three domains of multicultural competency so it can be concluded that the study abroad experience had a positive impact equally to the three domains of awareness, knowledge and skill.

This study also indicates that the three domains of awareness, knowledge, and skill, can be used as a fair representation of multicultural competency as a whole as they shared both a high level of internal consistency and were correlated to one-another. This study then adds to the literature on this topic and furthers the validity of the theoretical framework of Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller, and their domains for multicultural competency.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine if a study abroad experience could have a positive impact on student affairs graduate student’s multicultural competency. Placed within the theoretical framework of Pope et al. (2004), the results indicated that the participants’ multicultural awareness, knowledge and skill were impacted. Some of the qualitative data gathered from the survey indicate what specific experiences played a role in positively impacting their awareness, knowledge, and skill.

Participants identified that their awareness was impacted by the study abroad experience as they were more willing to self-examine their own values worldviews and assumptions, and they believe that learning about others who are culturally different is necessary and rewarding. This implies that from their interactions with native people and the community they began to realize the importance of re-examining their own beliefs and seeing the benefit from learning from those who are culturally different. This type of development of awareness can translate to seeking further knowledge and developing skill working with those culturally different from themselves. There was no question that participants disagreed with more than they agreed or strongly agreed with and the reason for that may be that a study abroad experience where cultural immersion is a core component of it is inherently designed to increase the multicultural awareness of its participants. As for the qualitative datum, a greater understanding of how it's difficult to communicate when you do not speak the native language of a country aligns with Pope et al.'s, definition of multicultural awareness where an individual becomes more aware of how their values, attitudes or assumptions impact how they interact with someone culturally different from themselves (2004).

From the quantitative data the reoccurring theme that emerged dealt with an understanding of how cultural differences can affect verbal and non-verbal communication and how language affects individuals and their experiences, which is in line with the strongest impact to awareness which also dealt with languages and becoming aware of how language barriers can affect communication. It stands to reason that students would thus seek out greater knowledge in these areas and report a greater impact to these areas of their multicultural knowledge. It is worth noting that this is different from what was reported in the qualitative datum but that may be attributed to the participants reflecting on different aspects of the experience as they

responded to the survey questions. The lowest responses came from knowledge about sexual orientation and disability and how they impact individuals and their experiences. As these weren't experiences that were featured within the study abroad experience it stands to reason that there was less of an impact on these areas. And as for the qualitative datum, this is again in line with the theoretical framework of Pope et al. (2004), which states that multicultural knowledge encompasses the knowledge of a cultural group, "that is typically not taught in many preparation programs" (p. 14-15). The participants identified the immersion and historical context as important to their multicultural knowledge.

The quantitative data reported for multicultural skill indicate that study abroad experiences have the most significant impact on the participants' ability to empathize and this can be attributed to the prolonged exposure and interaction with people who were culturally different from them, even in a short-term program. This has been identified as an important component to developing cultural competency and a study abroad experience is able to offer this development of skill along with the previously discussed benefits to awareness and knowledge. And although student's felt that they didn't gain the skill to be able to develop institutional interventions or develop cultural interventions this is a component that could be addressed in the future through an in-depth discussion of how to take the awareness and knowledge gained from the experience and direct it towards intervention strategies.

The results of this study show that the study abroad experience did have a moderate statistical impact on the participants' multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skill. Because of these results it can be concluded that study abroad experiences, even those as short as two weeks, can have a positive impact on the participants' multicultural competency. What's more, it's notable that while the study abroad experience impacted the participants' multicultural

awareness and knowledge, it also had a positive impact on their multicultural skill. Previous studies mentioned in Chapter 2 such as those conducted by, Watson et al. (2013), Kitsantas (2004), and Coers et al. (2013), all examined cultural competency and reported that participants had gained multicultural awareness and knowledge but were less conclusive as to the significance that study abroad could have on its participants' multicultural skill. This is important because student affairs practitioners need multicultural skill as much as they need awareness and knowledge, so if study abroad experiences only offered awareness and knowledge the argument couldn't be made for study abroad experiences being impactful to student affairs graduate student's multicultural competency as a whole. And although there wasn't a control group to compare the multicultural competency gained from the overall graduate experience versus the study abroad experience these results are certainly significant.

The fact that participants gained multicultural awareness and knowledge is also important to note. In the research conducted by Kennedy et al. (2014) and Johnson III and Rivera (2007), suggested that student affairs graduate students can be resistant to dialogue and in-class discussions regarding multiculturalism. However, study abroad experiences such as the one examined provide an impactful way for students to gain multicultural awareness and knowledge in a different way than class discussions might. What's more, little research has tied together the three domains of multicultural competency and so these results demonstrate how study abroad is a viable way to positively impact student affairs graduate students' multicultural competency and thus meet the standards set forth by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.

Recommendations

Based on the implications of the research there are several recommendations for both practice and further research. One of the main implications for higher education graduate preparation programs is that if they have study abroad experiences they should be researching the impact that those experiences have on their graduate students' multicultural competency. If a higher education graduate preparation program doesn't have a study abroad experience they should still be examining the ways in which their program meets the criteria set forth by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, and specifically multicultural competency. Additionally, programs that don't offer a study abroad experience should look into the benefits of study abroad and consider building a study abroad experience or other cultural immersion experiences to offer their graduate students as a means of fostering those students' multicultural competency. One of the main proponents against study abroad experiences is the cost and so programs should also look for more cost efficient means to achieve the same goals that study abroad does, such as study away experiences.

The results of this research have also indicated several possible areas for further research. On the whole, further research into how student affairs graduate preparation programs develop their students' multicultural competency needs to be conducted. Current literature is very vague about what particular parts of a graduate preparation program are increasing student's multicultural competency and so it's difficult to recommend specific programs or class discussions for other programs. Therefore, qualitative research should be conducted to gather information rich data to help determine what specific experiences are facilitating students gaining multicultural competency, whether that's study abroad or in-class experiences. There also needs to be further research and development of the multicultural competency instrument

and increased testing with more participants and other institutional types to determine if the instrument can be utilized in a multitude of settings. Finally, further research needs to be conducted to determine if study abroad locations play a factor in the multicultural competency gained by its participants.

Appendix A

Dear CSAL Graduate:

Please take the time (*approximately 15-20 minutes*) to complete the attached survey regarding your participation in the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad Program between 1999-2010. We are interested in the degree to which this experience may have impacted your multicultural competence. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any of the questions contained in this survey. **All answers are confidential and no identifying questions have been included.** Your participation in this study will benefit the CSAL program in its continued efforts to provide the best experience possible for its graduate students and the results of this survey will be utilized for a master's thesis. If you are interested in receiving the results of this research, or you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact Matt Musser at musserma@gvsu.edu/616-502-3703 or Dr. Cooper at cooperj@gvsu.edu/616-662-9313

The following definition of multicultural competence is provided for your reference: Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004) define multicultural competency as, “the **awareness, knowledge, and skills** needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaningful, relevant, and productive ways” (p. 13).

“**Multicultural awareness** constitutes those values, attitudes, and assumptions essential to working with students who are culturally different from a particular student affairs professional. . . **Multicultural knowledge** consists of the content knowledge about various cultural groups that is typically not taught in many preparation programs. . . **Multicultural skills** consist of those behaviors that allow us to effectively apply the multicultural awareness and knowledge we have internalized” (pp. 14-15).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Paul Reitemeier PhD of the HRCC of Grand Valley State University at reitemep@gvsu.edu (616-331-3417). The research proposal has been approved by the Human Research Committee at Grand valley State University HRRC approval number 15-056-H

Appendix B

Adapted from Pope, R. L., Reynolds, A. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2004). *Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad Survey

Please use the following Likert Scale when responding to the questions below:

1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3=Neither Agree or Disagree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

Part I: Multicultural Awareness

My participation in the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad program had an impact on my...

	SD	D	N/A	A	SA
1. Belief that learning about others who are culturally different is necessary and rewarding	1	2	3	4	5
2. Willingness to take risks and see them as necessary and important for personal and professional growth	1	2	3	4	5
3. Personal commitment to justice, social change, and combating oppression	1	2	3	4	5
4. Belief in the value and significance of an individual's cultural heritage and worldview as a starting place for understanding others who are culturally different	1	2	3	4	5
5. Willingness to self-examine and when necessary, challenge and change my own values, worldview, assumptions and biases	1	2	3	4	5
6. Openness to change, and belief that change is necessary and positive	1	2	3	4	5
7. Acceptance of other worldviews	1	2	3	4	5
8. Willingness to acknowledge that, an individual, I do not have all the answers	1	2	3	4	5
9. Belief that cultural differences do not have to interfere with effective communication or meaningful relationships	1	2	3	4	5
10. Awareness of my own cultural heritage and how it affects my worldview, values, and assumptions	1	2	3	4	5
11. Awareness of my own behavior and its impact on others	1	2	3	4	5
12. Awareness of the interpersonal process that occurs within multicultural interactions	1	2	3	4	5

13. Please describe any experiences you had during the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad trip that had a significant impact on your multicultural awareness, please be as specific as possible.

Part II: Multicultural Knowledge

My participation in the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad program had an impact on my...

	SD	D	N/A	A	SA
1. Knowledge of diverse cultures and oppressed groups (i.e., history, traditions, values, customs, resources, issues)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Knowledge about how change occurs for individual values and behaviors	1	2	3	4	5
3. Knowledge about the ways that cultural differences affects verbal and nonverbal communication	1	2	3	4	5
4. Knowledge about how gender affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
5. Knowledge about how class affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
6. Knowledge about how race affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
7. Knowledge about how ethnicity affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
8. Knowledge about how language affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
9. Knowledge about how nationality affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
10. Knowledge about how sexual orientation affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
11. Knowledge about how age affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
12. Knowledge about how religion affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
13. Knowledge about how spirituality affects individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
14. Knowledge about how disability and ability affect individuals and their experiences	1	2	3	4	5
15. Knowledge about culturally appropriate resources and how to make referrals	1	2	3	4	5
16. Knowledge about the nature of institutional oppression and power	1	2	3	4	5

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. Knowledge about how the acculturation process for members of oppressed groups impact individuals, groups, intergroup relations, and society | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Knowledge about identity development models | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Knowledge about within-group differences and understanding of multiple identities and multiple oppressions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Knowledge and understanding of internalized oppression and its impact on identity and self-esteem | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Knowledge about institutional barriers that limit access to and success in higher education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Please describe any experiences you had during the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad trip that had a significant impact on your multicultural knowledge, please be as specific as possible | | | | | |

Part III: Multicultural Skills

My participation in the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad program had an impact on my...

- | | SD | D | N/A | A | SA |
|---|----|---|-----|---|----|
| 1. Ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Ability to assess the impact of cultural differences and communication and effectively communicate across those differences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Ability to empathize and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from myself | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Ability to incorporate new learning and prior learning in new situations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Ability to gain the trust and respect of individuals who are culturally different from myself | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Ability to accurately assess my own multicultural skills, comfort level, growth, and development | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Ability to differentiate among individual differences, cultural differences, and universal similarities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Ability to challenge and support individuals and systems around oppression issues in a manner that optimizes multicultural interventions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Ability to make individual, group, and institutional multicultural interventions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Ability to use cultural knowledge and sensitivity to make more culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
11. Please describe any experiences you had during the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad trip that had a significant impact on your multicultural skills, please be as specific as possible

Part IV: Additional Information

1. Please identify your race or write “prefer not to disclose”:

2. Please specify your sex:

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Trans*
- d. _____
- e. Prefer not to disclose

3. Please indicate the two primary functional areas within which you have worked since your participation in the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad program

- 1. Housing and residence life
- 2. Student Life
- 3. Academic Advising
- 4. Financial Aid
- 5. Admissions
- 6. Counseling
- 7. Career Counseling
- 8. Academic Affairs
- 9. Campus Recreation
- 10. Student Affairs Administration
- 11. Multicultural Affairs
- 12. Women’s Center
- 13. LBGT Center
- 14. Other _____

4. Please feel free to provide any additional reflections you have on your participation in the CSAL/Mexico Study Abroad program that impacted your multicultural competency and your professional practice
5. Please feel free to provide us with any additional information regarding your Masters program experience in the CSAL program as it relates to developing multicultural competence

Appendix C

Please note that Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [637166-1] Multicultural Competence from Study Abroad in Graduate Preparation Programs

Principal Investigator: Matt Musser, BS History

Submission Type: New Project

Date Submitted: September 30, 2014

Action: EXEMPT

Effective Date: November 5, 2014

Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Paul Reitemeier at reitemep@gvsu.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org

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