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The Development of Vocational Calling, Identity, and Faith in College Students: A Preliminary
Study of the Impact of Study Abroad

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Abstract

The present study examined the impact of an international program experience on college students' personal growth in the areas of faith, vocational calling, and identity. Participants were selected from a random sample of 300 students belonging to a Lilly Endowment sponsored study. A subsample of 37 students who participated in an international program (the IP Group) was matched demographically to 37 students who did not (No IP Group). Repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted, revealing significant interaction effects, indicating that faith, life purpose, and identity achievement scores increased over time for the IP Group but decreased for the No IP Group.

The Development of Vocational Calling, Identity, and Faith in College Students:

A Preliminary Study of the Impact of Study Abroad

College students in the United States have studied abroad as part of their educational experience since Indiana University first sponsored its summer educational tours in 1881, according to the chronology of Hoffa (2007). Soon thereafter, many schools established programs abroad, ranging from the Princeton-in-Asia program in 1898 to the Rhodes Scholarship program in 1904 and the Fulbright Scholar program beginning in 1948 (Hoffa, 2007). By the third decade of the twentieth century, there was some kind of study abroad offering for undergraduates available in nearly every college on the eastern seaboard of the United States, complementing an effort by many European universities to offer summer courses for foreigners on their own campuses (Hoffa, 2007). These practices continue today in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America.

Not only do a significant number of universities have students who study abroad, but the frequency of student participation in these programs that earn academic credit has risen dramatically over the last twenty years. According to Bhandari & Chow (2007), there were approximately 44,000 U.S. students who studied abroad for academic credit in 1986, compared to over 223,000 students in 2006. This represents an average annual growth rate of 23%. By contrast, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2008), there were 12,504,000 students attending college in 1986, compared with 17,672,000 in 2006. Thus, the relative number of students studying abroad for academic credit rose from 0.35% of the student population to 1.26%. Clearly, international education experiences are becoming an increasingly important component of the higher education enterprise.

College students participate in study abroad programs for many reasons, including their desire to travel, to experience another culture, to enhance their language skills, to fulfill degree requirements for their university, or simply to take advantage of the opportunity to live and learn in another setting. The benefits of such an experience are many and varied. There is evidence in current research literature that students who participate in an educational experience in an international setting demonstrate an increase in foreign language proficiency (DuFon and Churchill, 2006), in cultural understanding (Zielinski, 2007), as well as in personal growth, self-awareness, and self-understanding (Black and Duhon, 2006). In addition, there is a growing body of research literature that identifies study abroad programs as one of several key curriculum components for enhancing student engagement in undergraduate education (Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh and Laird, 2008).

Foreign Language Proficiency

According to the work of Geertz (1973), cultures are stratigraphic systems that define the relations between biological, physical, and social realities of human life, with cultural universals forming our institutionalized responses to these realities. One universal which is critical to defining culture is its set of symbols, included in which is that culture's language. Indeed, without an understanding of the culture's language, with its nuances and hidden meanings, one cannot, ultimately, understand the culture itself. Advances in foreign language acquisition are most significant when accompanied by movement away from home, in another cultural setting (Freed, Segaloqitz, & Dewey, 2004). In addition, students who study abroad gain a sense of membership in the attending culture because they are more self-aware of their language skills and

accordingly are therefore more inclined to ask foreign interlocutors for assistance to increase their comprehension (Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008). Language proficiency moves the students from an introductory conversancy with peoples of other cultures and countries toward a deeper engagement with the people themselves. This movement provides the opportunity for students to gain a better understanding of the host country people, facilitating their awareness and sensitivity toward the host culture.

Cultural Understanding

From language acquisition, two additional, sequential benefits of an international study experience flow – cultural awareness and intercultural relationships. Geertz (1973) argues that cultural understanding involves two layers of the cultural stratigraphy: 1) awareness of cultural norms and mores, and 2) interpersonal engagement with people in the cultural framework. The first level can be experienced, albeit superficially, without visiting or residing in the host country. It may not last, however, unless it is accompanied by the second layer, wherein the individual invests interpersonally with others in the culture. The second layer can be apprehended only if one enters the cultural geography itself.

In terms of cultural awareness, there are a number of studies that examine the potential impact of an international learning experience, first in terms of the duration of the experience and second, in terms of the longitudinal changes that occur within the timeframe of the experience. Zielinski (2007), for example, measured the cross-cultural adaptability of undergraduate college students participating in study abroad programs of various durations, with the goal of determining the minimum time required for cultural awareness to become apparent. In this pre/post study, the Cross-Cultural Adaptability

Inventory was used to assess four factors associated with cross-cultural adaptability: (a) emotional resilience, (b) flexibility/openness, (c) perceptual acuity, and (d) personal autonomy. Her work demonstrated that students who participated in programs lasting nine weeks or longer showed higher levels of cross-cultural awareness, indicating openness toward and understanding of other cultures.

According to Geertz (1973), cultural awareness is requisite to cultural interaction. In this regard, Kitsantas (2004) examined the broader impact that study abroad programs have on students' cross-cultural skills as a function of their cultural awareness. The results showed that not only do students who study abroad gain deeper cultural understanding, but they often act upon this increased level of understanding by actualizing their desire to engage with members of the host culture, which brings even deeper personal benefits. According to Domville-Roach (2007), for example, language acquisition leads to a greater ability on the part of study abroad students to build relationships with the host nationals, learn about a new culture, and experience personal change in the form of emotional growth, intellectual development, and professional development. Other researchers, such as Black & Duhon (2006), demonstrated that summer study abroad programs increase students' desire and ability to interact effectively with people of other cultures – particularly, their flexibility, emotional resilience, and their sense of personal autonomy.

As an extra benefit, subsequent to interpersonal engagement with members of other cultures, there is evidence that students embrace a more positive view of both the cultural members and of themselves. Engagement with host nationals, according to Drews, Meyer, and Peregrine (1996), is associated with a more "personalized" view of

other national groups. In this study, those who had studied abroad were more likely to conceive of other national groups in terms associated with the character of individuals and less likely to think of national groups in terms of food, historical events, geographical characteristics, and similarly non-personal attributes than they had previously stated. Thus, the study abroad engagement experience, viewed as an educational intervention, brought about a deeper sense of commonality between the U.S. students and the people with whom they associated from their host country. McCabe (1994) found that students reflected upon their identity of citizenship and negotiated the multiple ways their national identity was interpreted abroad by foreign locals. These findings suggest that international study experiences contribute to several forms of cultural understanding: a) awareness of the cultural frameworks, b) personal interaction with host nationals, and c) more positive views of other cultures and of one's self.

Personal Growth

As students encounter another culture and build relationships with its members, they may also gain a deeper understanding of themselves, leading to various forms of personal growth. Based on the writing of Pausanias, ancient Greek traveler and geographer, living and learning abroad may contribute to one of the oldest cultural aphorisms, as inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: γνωθι σαψτον ("know thyself"), (Habicht, 1985).

There is also evidence in the contemporary literature attesting to personal growth that may occur, including emotional and intellectual growth. The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES), for example, conducted a study of 3,400 college students that had studied abroad, spanning a 49-year period. Student feedback

revealed deep personal growth including focused education and career goals at the conclusion of their study abroad (Dwyer & Peters, 2004). Results of a study conducted through a Midwest school indicated that a study abroad experience led to gains in confidence, maturity, and empathy among the student participants (Gray, Murdock, & Stebbins 2002). In narrative interviews, Sindt (2007) found that American college students reported significant personal growth in the form of maturation, autonomy and self-reliance, and increased desire to apply themselves to their field of study. Finally, the impact of an overseas, one-year study abroad program in England upon U.S. college students was measured via results from a four-part survey questionnaire that participants completed. Substantial changes were reported in attitudes, specific knowledge levels, beliefs, values, behaviors, open-mindedness, personal growth, and general appreciation of other cultures (Thomlison, 1991). Thus, the literature reveals both interest in and evidence of impact on personal growth of college students when they participate in an international study experience.

The Current Study

Our review of previous research suggests that living and learning in another country is associated with two fundamental outcomes. The first is an increase in *external* connections, manifested through an increased ability to converse in another tongue and an increased understanding and sensitivity to another culture. The second outcome is an *internal* redirection, resulting in a deepening sense of one's identity and self-awareness. Joseph Campbell has much to say about both of these elements, as he writes about the importance of journey. About the external dimension he says: "And this is the basic mythological problem: Move into a landscape. Find the sanctity of that land. And then

there can be a matching of your own nature with this gorgeous nature of the land. It is the first essential adaptation" (Campbell, 2003, p.7). Campbell notes, however, that external change is not legitimate unless it is accompanied by internal change. We leave home and, perhaps for the first time, discover ourselves. We step outside our bodies, so to speak, and accordingly we see our own body anew. Campbell himself lived this out in his travels and subsequent scholarship. It was when he moved to Paris that he came into contact with his very deepest passion, the world common to all of mankind – the world of inner transformation.

As the preceding literature review indicates, study abroad experiences and their relationship to several external educational goals have been studied extensively in terms of its effects on enhancing foreign language acquisition as well as cultural awareness and intercultural relationships. In addition, there is growing evidence of the importance of study abroad programs on other external higher education goals such as "high-impact" practices that engage college students to a greater extent than traditional classroom-based instructional experiences. The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), for example, recently described evidence of the most significant activities that impact student success in and beyond the college years (Kuh, 2008). Study abroad was one of these "high impact activities," identified as affecting such areas as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, knowledge of human cultures and the physical/natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, deep/integrative learning, and post-college performance (Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh and Laird, 2008).

In contrast, research addressing higher education goals associated with the interior life and its redirection have not yet been fully explored in terms of their connection to study abroad experiences. The current study, therefore, focuses on several elements of personal growth and internal redirection that are particularly salient during the college years. The first element is students' developing sense of life purpose, or vocational calling. Questions about life meaning and purpose often surface during the college years as students consider issues associated with both faith beliefs and career options. For the purpose of the current study, we draw from the conceptual literature on vocation and life purpose and define vocational calling somewhat broadly, as one's *sacred lifework,* which includes any human activity that gives meaning, purpose, and direction to life. In discerning one's vocational calling, then, the question is this: "What am I supposed to do with my life?" or "What am I living for?" Although little attention has been given to this area of personal growth, it is of significant interest to many who study college student development. Indeed, many authors have argued that higher education can, and should, play a central role in helping students to discover and pursue their vocational callings (Crosby, 2004; Dalton, 2001).

The second element is students' developing sense of faith and spirituality. College students are increasingly interested in matters of religion, faith, and spirituality as it relates to their life purpose and sense of personal wholeness. For example, studies on beliefs and values among college students (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005), research projects focusing on youth and religion (Smith & Denton, 2005), and the surge in enrollments in religiously affiliated colleges and universities (Riley, 2004) evidence a movement toward a greater focus on faith, spirituality, and religion in the academy. In

addition, Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999) suggest that religion is the only area in which one encounters commitment to an ultimate concern or purpose and as a result, might inspire the development of life purpose or a sense of vocation. There have been numerous studies that have researched the relationship between faith and life purpose, and findings indicate a positive relationship between life purpose and various aspects of faith, such as mysticism (Byrd, Lear, & Schwenka, 2000), spiritual experiences (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991), religious conversion (Paloutzian et al., 1999), and spiritual strivings (Emmons, 2005).

The third and final element of student growth examined in the current study is students' identity development. We believe that academic study abroad contributes to helping students gain their sense of identity which in turn contributes to both faith development and a deeper sense of vocational calling. Our work is an attempt to see evidence of aspects of the "hero journey," as described by Joseph Campbell (2003) and Richard Rohr (1994), within the college experience of study abroad. The purpose of this journey is twofold – first, for the hero to grow up and move into adulthood, realizing his/her "name" and identity, and second, to discover his/her purpose in life (i.e., what they love most and where that love meets the world's needs). This journey involves three key phases: a) separation and departure, b) exploration and discovery, and c) return. These milestones occur, for the most part, when a young adult goes away to college, ultimately bringing about the sojourner's self-discovery and sense of vocational calling. Moreover, these events are found compressed and accentuated when that young person leaves their homeland to live and study in another country and culture. Thus, we have engaged in the current research in order to see evidence of significant development of

faith, vocational calling, and identity when a college student lives and studies abroad. Although to date we know of no studies linking identity development to life purpose or vocational calling, there are a significant number of studies that tie the development of identity to the maturation of religious faith (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Lindholm, 2006; Maslow, 1999).

Thus, the current study is a response to the call for greater understanding of the interior aspects of student development, as bound to significant experiences in the life of the college student, particularly the increasingly popular experience of study abroad. Our approach to gaining this understanding is to provide empirical evidence of the ways in which an international living and learning experience significantly enhances college student development in the areas of identity, faith, and vocational calling. Accordingly, our research hypothesis is that students who participate in study abroad programs experience significantly greater changes in faith, vocational calling, and identity development than do students who do not participate in such programs.

Method

Participants

The sample for the current study was derived from a random sample of 300 students from the 2002 entering class of a private, Christian, liberal arts university in Southern California participating in a longitudinal study on the development of faith, identity, and life purpose. The sample for the current study consisted of 74 students ranging in age from 18-22 years and included 28 males and 46 females. Participants were predominantly Caucasian (70%), with other ethnicities also present (7% Asian, 8% Latino, 1% African American, and 14% other). The

majority of participants reported Protestant (65%) as their religious affiliation and approximately half (47%) reported parental income greater than $100,000.

Dependent Variable Measures

   Identity Status. An adapted version of the Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status (OMEIS; Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979) was used to assess identity. The OMEIS is based on James Marcia's (1966) theory of identity formation and provides a self-report alternative to the clinical interview. It has been used in a multitude of studies investigating the ego-identity status paradigm (Adams, 1998). Twenty studies investigating the reliability of the OMEIS indicated moderate to strong consistency between items (α=0.66), and evidence for consistency across multiple test administrations (r=0.76) (Adams, 1998). See Table 1 for an overview of the OMEIS subscales with sample items.

   The OMEIS was used to assign scores for participants on four identity status scales: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. The diffusion identity status describes individuals who have not explored alternative values, beliefs, and roles and have not established ideological commitments. The foreclosure status describes individuals who have made identity commitments but have not explored alternatives. They generally have adopted commitments from others and have not individualized these commitments. The moratorium identity status describes individuals who are in the midst of exploring and experimenting with various ideologies, values, and roles and have not yet made stable identity commitments. Finally, the achievement identity status describes individuals who have made stable identity commitments after having explored various alternatives.

   Faith Surveys. Two faith inventories were created for the current study in order to obtain a comprehensive assessment of the construct of faith. Together these measures tap the important

dimensions of faith identified in Wulff's (1997) review of research in the field of psychology of religion. In an effort to capture the complexity inherent in the construct, faith was defined along two dimensions: faith attitudes and faith experiences. Faith attitudes include how important faith is to the individual, how strong the individual's beliefs are, and to what extent the individual integrates faith into his or her daily life. Faith experiences include a behavioral component as well as an affective component. The behavior component consists of the nature of an individual's religious activities, both in public and private contexts. The affective component consists of the individual's experience of spiritual feelings. These dimensions of faith are consistent with Wulff's (1997) analysis of the main references in the literature identified with faith including the presence of: motivation and commitment to a supernatural power, affective states associated with a supernatural power, and behavioral acts carried out in reference of the supernatural power.

The Faith Attitude Survey (FAS) is a 13-item inventory that includes three subscales that asses: the extent to which the participant is personally convicted of his or her religious beliefs (Strength of Beliefs; $\alpha = 0.73$), the degree to which faith is important to the participant (Importance of Faith; $\alpha = 0.89$), and the extent to which faith is integrated into the various components of the participant's life (Life Application of Faith; $\alpha = 0.92$). Participants responded to items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." See Table 2 for an overview of the FAS subscales with sample items.

The Faith Experience Survey (FES) is a 9-item inventory that includes two subscales that assess: the frequency with which participants engage in various public and private religious activities (Religious Behavior; $\alpha = 0.75$) and the nature of participant's spiritual feelings (Spiritual Feelings; $\alpha = 0.87$). Participants responded to items by indicating how frequently they

experience various religious behaviors and feelings, such as "never," "once a week," or "one or two times per year" etc. See Table 2 for an overview of the FES subscales with sample items.

Vocational Calling Survey (VCS). An additional measure was created for the current study in order to obtain a brief assessment of the construct of life purpose. For the purpose of the current study, we defined life purpose in a Christian context and relied on the conceptual literature on vocational calling. Whereas the secular perspective generally defines vocation as one's work, career, or occupation, the Christian perspective generally views vocation in a spiritual context, as a charge to love and serve others with one's God-given gifts and talents (Buechner, 1993; Farnham, Gill, McLean, & Ward, 1991; Hardy, 1990; Raines & Day-Lower, 1986). We conceptualize vocational calling somewhat broadly to include any human activity that gives meaning, purpose, and direction to life. The VCS, therefore, included two subscales: one 6-item subscale assessing participants' general sense of life purpose and vocational calling, as well as their awareness of their gifts and talents ($\alpha = 0.79$) and one 3-item subscale assessing participants' commitment to serving others either generally or through their career choice ($\alpha = 0.69$). See Table 2 for sample items measuring sense of life purpose and calling and commitment to serving others.

Independent Variable – International Program Participation

Our institution has a 45-year history of offering international learning experiences to its undergraduate population. At present, nearly 60% of the undergraduates at our institution participate in at least one semester of study in an international location. Furthermore, approximately 65% of our university faculty members participate in these programs, serving as visiting faculty who live and learn alongside the students in these international settings. We

currently offer year round and single semester learning opportunities in the following locations: Buenos Aires, Argentina; Canberra, Australia; Hong Kong, China; Shanghai, China; Costa Rica; London England; Florence, Italy; Heidelberg, Germany; Honduras; Edinburgh, Scotland; Madrid, Spain; Lausanne, Switzerland; Chiang Mai, Thailand; and Uganda, Rwanda. For the majority of our programs, students apply during their first year and then study abroad during their sophomore year, following which they re-assimilate into our home campus culture.

Our office of International Programs exists to promote the following mission: To provide students a life changing international experience designed for intellectual, social, personal and spiritual transformation. These international experiences focus on five areas: academic study, extensive travel opportunities, living in another country and culture, engagement in service projects, and mentoring by peers, program faculty, and program staff. In terms of academic study, each student enrolls in an average of sixteen semester credits each semester, with courses in language, history, literature, philosophy, art, music and discipline specific coursework taught by the attending visiting professor from our main campus. In addition to a visiting professor from our U.S. campus, each program employs a number of local faculty members who are responsible for maintaining the continuity of the curriculum as well as offering students the opportunity to learn from a resident of the country in which they are studying.

One obvious benefit of being in an international setting is not only the opportunity to travel within that country but also to travel to neighboring countries, thereby deepening the impact of the study abroad experience. Class scheduling in our programs provides a number of three-day weekends. These allow the students to travel to other countries and cities in informal groups, so that they can explore other cultures and locations beyond their home base. In addition, each international program site organizes several week long field trip excursions to

distant countries. In this way, during the course of a fifteen week semester, students are able to engage with many international experiences in a number of cultural settings.

Our programs afford academic study and travel within the context of a close knit living community. Our institution provides two kinds of living community opportunities: a program facility model and the home-stay model. With the former arrangement, approximately fifty students live together with the visiting faculty family in a university owned facility – which includes housing, dining, library, computer labs, and classrooms. The home-stay programming approach provides each student the opportunity to live with a local family, and then join their peers for classes, social gatherings, and interactions with the visiting faculty family.

Many of our programs offer students the opportunity to participate in service projects in the local international community, primarily focusing on volunteer work with social service organizations. These projects provide students the opportunity to know more about the culture of their country beyond what they learn by travel or study. Indeed, the students get to develop a relationship with members of another culture over a semester or year's timeframe. This helps deepen their understanding of people beyond their own cultural upbringing.

Finally, in each international setting, students are encouraged to reach out to the program staff, visiting and local faculty, and to one another, in order to develop close friendships and significant interpersonal relationships. These friendships become an important way for students to build social and interpersonal networks that help them in their assimilation into a home away from home, thereby providing them a support structure for their international program experience and the creation of lifelong friendships and extended families.

Procedure

Three hundred prospective participants were randomly selected from the 2002 entering class of a private, Christian, liberal arts college in southern California. Prospective participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to insure equal numbers of males and females. Students were sent a letter inviting them to complete a web-based survey during the spring of their first year of study at the university. Participants were then surveyed every spring each of their four years as undergraduates. Those who chose to participate provided demographic information and then completed the dependent measures in the following order: OMEIS, FAS, FES, LPS. The survey materials required approximately 30 minutes to complete. As an incentive, participants received one hour of convocation credit for participating in the study. Response rates across the four years ranged from 64-83%.

For the purpose of the present study, 99 students who completed the survey during both their first-year and senior year were considered for selection in order to compare scores on the dependent measures before students attended an international program (First-year score) to scores following participation in such a program (Senior score). Of these students, 60% had participated in an international program. A subsample of 37 college students who participated in an international program experience (the IP Group) was matched on age and gender to 37 college students who did not participate in such a program (the No IP Group).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Preliminary Group Comparisons

We conducted chi-square analyses of the responses of the IP and No IP Groups on demographic information and the results are shown in Table 3. Results indicated no significant

group differences, suggesting that group differences obtained in subsequent group comparisons were not due to group differences in socioeconomic status, religion, or ethnicity.

Group Comparisons on Faith Measures

We conducted a 2 X 2 (Group X Time) repeated-measures ANOVA on participants' First-Year and Senior scores for each faith measure. Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations by IP Group for both the First-Year and Senior assessment periods. Significant Time effects were observed for both Importance of Faith, $F(1,72) = 7.41$, $p < .01$, and Religious Behavior, $F(1,72) = 5.73$, $p < .03$. These findings suggest that student attitudes about the importance of their faith as well as the frequency of their religious behavior decreased from their first-year of college to their senior year regardless of whether they attended an international program (see Table 4). A marginally significant Group X Time interaction effect was observed, however, for Application of Faith scores, $F(1,72) = 3.10$, $p < .09$ (see Figure 1) suggesting that application of faith scores increased over time for students who attended an international program but decreased over time for students who did not attend an international program.

Group Comparisons on Vocational Calling Measures

We conducted a 2 X 2 (Group X Time) repeated-measures ANOVA on participants' First-Year and Senior scores for each vocational calling measure. Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations by IP Group for both the First-Year and Senior assessment periods. Significant Group X Time interactions were observed for both Sense of Life Purpose, $F(1, 72) = 4.92$, $p < .04$, and Service to Others, $F(1, 72) = 7.68$, $p < . 01$, (see Table 5). These findings suggest that students' sense of life purpose and commitment to serving others increased over time for students who attend an international program but decreased over time for students who did not attend an international program (see Figures 2 and 3).

Group Comparisons on Identity Measures

We conducted a 2 X 2 (Group X Time) repeated-measures ANOVA on participants' First-Year and Senior scores for each identity measure. Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations by IP Group for both the First-Year and Senior assessment periods. A significant Time effect was observed for Foreclosure scores, $F(1,72) = 9.37$, $p < .01$, suggesting that students' Foreclosure scores decreased from their first-year of college to their senior year regardless of whether or not they attended an international program (see Table 6). A marginally significant Group X Time interaction was observed, however, for Achievement scores, $F(1, 72) = 3.68$, $p < .07$, suggesting that achievement scores increased over time for students who attended an international program but decreased slightly for those who did not attend an international program (see Figure 4).

Discussion

Our original research hypothesis stated that students who participate in study abroad programs will experience significantly greater developmental change in faith, vocational calling, and identity development compared to students who do not participate in such programs. Our findings suggest that many of these changes, in some fashion, do occur. First, our findings indicate that students reported that the importance of their faith and their practice of religious behavior both decreased from their first year to their senior year, regardless of whether or not they participated in an international program experience. These findings are consistent with previous findings from Bryant & Astin (2008) who demonstrated that college students experience spiritual struggle, including disillusionment with their religious upbringing and subsequently becoming disenchanted with religious practice. In addition, their research provided evidence that college students

feel unsettled about religious matters such as evil, suffering, and death, causing them to question the value of their personal faith. Bryant & Astin point to several factors that affect this spiritual struggle, including students' encountering events that threaten their customary state of being. Other researchers, such as Lindholm (2006), have discovered that many students develop religious skepticism and distrust of organized religion over their college years. This decrease in the importance of faith and religious practice are no doubt due to the intellectual challenges present in the college experience, wherein exposure to religious diversity and to other worldviews can contribute to challenges to students' beliefs and religious practice systems. Thus, our findings are consistent with these and similar findings in the research literature with regard to the disengagement that some students may experience with regard to their faith or religious heritage during the college years.

In contrast, our findings suggested that the application of one's faith to daily living and decision-making increased for students who participated in a study abroad program and decreased for those students who did not participate in a study abroad program, supporting our original hypothesis. This difference may be attributable to external factors that students encounter during their study abroad experience that challenge their faith assumptions and force them to commit to their application. Students who study overseas, for example, may be more inclined to encounter day-to-day circumstances that push them to rely on their faith in order to deal with the challenges of living in another culture. Faith may serve as one of their first coping mechanisms in situations where they encounter doubts, confusion, and the unknown of living abroad. Subsequently, they discover an invaluable, readily available inner resource that provides

them a means of sustaining and informing their day-to-day living. Other researchers have found evidence of the powerful influence of religious coping in stressful situations (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998).

Also in support of our research hypothesis, the understanding of one's sense of vocational calling, and having the inclination to serve others, were both significantly affected by a study abroad experience. Students' sense of vocational calling and desire to serve others increased from the first year to the senior year for those who participated in a study abroad program whereas students' sense of life purpose and desire to serve others decreased for those who did not participate in a study abroad program. Research on life purpose, such as the work of Wong & Fry (1998) suggests that life transitions and experiences that lead to positive relations with others will frequently contribute to maturation in both one's sense and application of life purpose. Other authors, such as Damon, Menon, & Bronk (2003) argue that loss of a sense of life purpose is frequently associated with self-absorption and one's inability to hold a larger perspective of one's place in the world. Therefore, we believe that one of the reasons that a study abroad experience contributes positively to vocational calling is the presence of a significant two-fold effect. Students who study abroad are exposed to a larger world, by virtue of their living and learning in a culture that is foreign to their upbringing, and these same students, in an effort to find their personal moorings, often seek peer and older adult mentors as well as membership in new social communities during their study abroad. The combination of these two experiences may be the reason that their vocational maturity increases. International study provides an external environment that challenges their thinking about the world and about themselves, and it also may provide a mechanism for students to recover from these challenges and grow stronger in a sense of certainty of their life direction and in their resolve to serve

others. The latter may result from their realization, as they live in another country, that the world needs them, providing them a new direction in life, as well as the need for them to reach out, relationally, for support from friends and advisors.

Finally, our research demonstrated some of the potential effects of study abroad on identity development. First, the significant decrease in foreclosure scores that were observed for all students in our sample is consistent with the work of Honess, Yardley, and Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1987), who argue that this identity status naturally decreases in young adults over time. As students grow and develop over time, they gain a greater sense of ownership over their own values and beliefs rather than simply adopting those of influential authority figures. In terms of identity achievement, significant increases were observed for the study abroad students but not those students who did not participate in such a program. These findings are due, in part, to the fact that achievement identity scores were significantly higher in students not attending an international program compared to those that did attend, during the first year assessment period. The changes in the international program group on achievement identity, however, is interesting because it ties to several phenomena cited by Honess and colleagues (1987) as well as with the work of Meeus, Iedema, Helsen and Vollebergh (1999). These phenomena include the presence of time-limited crises that force students to reflect on their sense of self, and significant educational events and experiences that trigger an identity status transition. We believe that these same factors are present in the international study experience, largely in the form of the semester or year-long limits of the study abroad experience, travel in another country and the attendant exposure to other cultures, and the

opportunity to be away from the familiarities of home, forcing students to reflect on their sense of self.

Consistent with the work of Geertz (1973), there are a number of cultural universals and transferable implications of this research for the educational work of faculty, students, and co-curricular professionals. First, our findings are consistent with recommendations made by Richard Light (2001), suggesting that students should seek to participate in situations in college life where religious diversity may be found, as these experiences force the examination of one's beliefs and values in a healthy way, and enhance respect for others' views. Learning to embrace cultural, spiritual, and intellectual diversity and conflict will broaden students' horizons and deepen their sense of place in the world. Indeed, if we are to be citizens of the world, we must heed the words of Martha Nussbaum (1997, p. 32): "There is no more effective way to wake pupils up than to confront them with difference in an area where they had previously thought their own ways neutral, necessary, and natural. […] Socratic inquiry mandates pluralism." And what better way than to "confront" our students with other perspectives, other ways of knowing, and other cultures. Second, our findings suggest to faculty and co-curricular staff in the academy that they should view their work as one of mentor to the protégé student, providing support, wisdom, challenge, and counsel. In particular, on the heels of any learning moment, students need to be able to reflect on their experiences with mentors who have been through similar rites of passage and are therefore able to share their seasoned perspective. In this vein, William James reminds us that all forms of conversion and transformation require "precisely the same psychological form of event – a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and

inconsistency" (2002, p. 196). It is the mentor, then, who provides part of this framework of stability for the protégé who is experiencing the stress of growth and development.

There were several methodological limitations to the current study. The first of these, our small sample size for the comparisons between groups, requires that we simply gather more data in order to confirm the preliminary results we have achieved thus far. Furthermore, we understand that one survey instrument, even administered longitudinally, is merely a single lens for our research investigation. Therefore, in future work, we plan to incorporate other research techniques besides survey methodology such as interviews or focus groups, in order to triangulate the findings we have observed thus far. In addition, in view of the overlap between the study abroad intervention analysis found in our work and the evidence from other researchers' work on change in faith, life purpose, and identity, we are also interested in further investigating the "why" behind the changes that occur in students who study abroad. Future research needs to examine the specific factors within the international program experience that are responsible for the positive outcomes associated with such experiences. As a signal of the continued research we hope to do, we hypothesize that there are three underlying reasons for these many changes: 1) *dislocation* – leaving home, 2) *initiation* – experiencing the differences of other cultures and seeking out mentoring and community, and 3) *return* – returning to the U.S. within a limited timeframe, requiring the student to assimilate their international experience into their ongoing domestic life. Finally, there was some selection bias in our two groups as those students who chose not to attend an international program scored higher on identity achievement than students who did choose to attend, when assessed during their first year of college. The groups did not differ on any other study variables

during the first-year assessment period, however, supporting the idea that the international program experience was a significant contributor to group differences. Future research should, however, control for differences in identity status by incorporating appropriate comparison groups or matching procedures. Above all, as we continue to work in this area, we are encouraged by the increasing interest that students have in study abroad and the apparently significant impact that it has on their lives.

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Table 1

Subscales and Sample Questions for the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status

Diffusion

- I guess I just kind of enjoy life in general, and I don't see myself living by any particular viewpoint to life.

- I haven't chosen the occupation I really want to get into, and I'm just working at whatever is available until something better comes along.

Foreclosure

- I guess I'm pretty much like my folks when it comes to politics. I follow what they do in terms of voting and such.

- My parents' views on life are good enough for me, I don't need anything else.

Moratorium

- I'm looking for an acceptable perspective for my own "life style", but haven't really found it yet.

- There are so many different political parties and ideals. I can't decide which to follow until I figure it all out.

Achievement

- It took me a long time to decide but now I know for sure what direction to move in for a career.

- I've thought my political beliefs through and realize I can agree with some and not other aspects of what my parents believe.

Table 2

Subscales and Sample Questions for the Faith Attitude, Faith Experience, Vocational Calling Surveys

Faith Attitude Survey	
Subscales	**Sample Items**
Strength of Beliefs	• I view myself as a religious person. • I have doubts about whether my religious beliefs are true.
Importance of Faith	• Religion is not a very important part of my life right now. • My faith is not very important to me.
Life Application of Faith	• I depend on my faith in God for decision-making and direction • I try hard to carry my religious beliefs into all other dealings in life.
Faith Experience Survey	
Religious Behavior	• How often do you attend religious services? • How often have you read the bible in the last year? • Within your religious or spiritual tradition, how often do you meditate?
Spiritual Feelings	• I find strength and comfort in my religion or faith • I feel God's love for me, directly or through others
Vocational Calling Survey	
Sense of Life Purpose, Calling, and Discernment	• I have a well-developed understanding of what my gifts and ta are. • I have a good sense for my purpose in life

Service Toward Others	• I plan to enter a career that emphasizes service to others.
	• I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffe in the world.

Table 3

Percent of Students in International Program Groups Across Demographic Variables

	International Program Group	
	IP Group	No IP Group

Demographic Variable

Parental Income:

<$40,000	14	19
$40,001-$70,000	22	27
$70,001-$100,000	16	14
$100,001-$130,000	11	19
>$130,000	37	21

Ethnicity:

African American	0	8
Asian	11	11
Caucasian	78	60
Latino	11	16
Other	0	5

Religion:

Catholic	11	16
Hindu	0	3
Jewish	3	0
Protestant	78	51
Other	8	30

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Faith Measures for IP Groups Across Measurement Periods

	Measurement Period							
	First-Year				Senior Year			
	IP Group		No IP Group		IP Group		No IP Group	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Faith Measure								
Belief Strength	23.16	4.83	23.11	3.41	23.16	4.15	22.68	4.18
Faith Importance	7.89a	2.69	7.27a	3.02	8.76b	1.42	8.35b	1.69
Faith Application	18.81	5.22	19.51	4.14	19.70	4.68	18.19	4.84
Religious Behavior	28.94a	7.75	27.23a	7.99	25.83b	8.25	24.97b	9.23
Spiritual Feelings	11.82	3.57	12.60	4.11	11.89	4.20	11.67	4.08

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations for Vocational Calling Measures for IP Groups Across Measurement Periods

	First-Year				Senior Year			
	IP Group		No IP Group		IP Group		No IP Group	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vocation Measure								
Sense of Life Purpose and Calling	21.38a	4.14	23.16a	3.69	23.57b	4.94	22.54b	5.25
Service To Others	11.24a	2.43	12.40a	2.74	12.60b	2.60	11.97b	2.60

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly at p < .05.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for Identity Measures for IP Groups Across Measurement Periods

	Measurement Period							
	First-Year				Senior Year			
	IP Group		No IP Group		IP Group		No IP Group	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Identity Measure								
Diffusion	19.95	7.02	19.05	6.12	17.69	6.74	18.08	4.07
Foreclosure	19.00a	6.75	17.51a	6.42	15.94b	8.12	15.32b	5.89
Moratorium	22.44	6.96	23.14	6.38	22.44	7.44	21.22	5.68
Achievement	29.04a	4.29	31.63b	4.67	31.25	5.93	31.03	4.85

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.
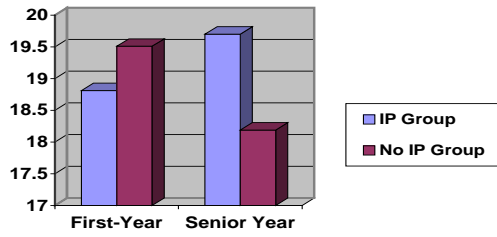
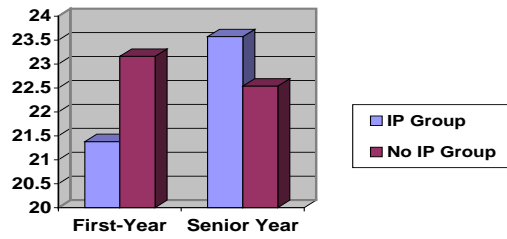Figure 1. Means for IP Groups on Application of Faith scores.

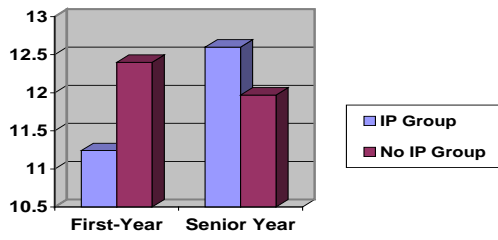Figure 2. Means for IP Groups on Sense of Life Purpose and Calling scores.

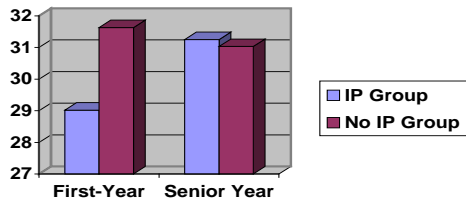Figure 3. Means for IP Groups on Service to Others scores.

Figure 4. Means for IP Groups on Achievement scores.