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Sustainability of Study Abroad Programs at Rural Community Colleges

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SUSTAINABILITY OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

AT RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINABILITY OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS AT RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Old Dominion University 2019
Chair: Dr. Mitchell R. Williams

In this era of increased globalization, it is important to prepare students to participate in world issues and a worldwide economy. Study abroad increases knowledge regarding international affairs, boosts access to valuable cross-cultural experiences, and promotes academic success, retention (Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2014), cultural awareness (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009), and professional growth (Younes & Asay, 2003). Community colleges educate nearly half of the nation's undergraduate students, but offer disproportionately few study-abroad programs (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). Little existing research has documented the study abroad experiences of community college students. Even fewer studies have addressed sparse community college participation in study abroad programs and approaches for improving it. No researchers have explored the result of study abroad participation on rural community colleges.

The researcher implemented a qualitative survey, interviewed leaders of community college short-term study abroad programs, and conducted document analysis aimed at developing sustainable short-term study abroad programs at rural community colleges. The findings revealed that rural community colleges would enhance faculty motivation and implement successful study abroad programs if administrators acknowledged and encouraged the efforts of study abroad leaders. The findings further indicated that study abroad programs at rural community colleges could be successfully and sustainably funded through various combinations of federal, state, and private initiatives. The results furthermore indicated that study abroad programs are more likely to be sustainable when structural changes are made in

the college to support study abroad. Finally, the findings of the study indicate that anxieties on the part of students and their families could be eased if faculty leaders took the initiative to build trusting personal relationships with them.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially my two wonderful children, Marley and Asher. You two are the loves of my life and my inspirations to continue. I also dedicate this dissertation to all the students and community members who have traveled the world with me; together, we opened minds and changed lives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this era of increased globalization, it is important to prepare United States citizens for participation in world issues and a worldwide economy. Study abroad represents an important initiative to help U.S. students acquire a better knowledge of international affairs and gain valuable cross-cultural experiences. In response to these benefits, study abroad by U.S. students has increased four-fold over the past 20 years (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2009). However, study abroad programs at the community college level remain rare and on the periphery of the mission of these two-year institutions (Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2014). While most four-year institutions are focused on research-based commitments, community colleges are focused instead on their commitments and obligations to the communities in which they are located (Raby, 2012). Commitment to the community is particularly characteristic of rural community colleges (Cressey, 2004), which are publicly funded and educate geographically-distributed students in small population centers (Vineyard, 1979). Fifty-nine percent of community colleges are identified as rural campuses, accounting for approximately 34% of community college students (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). A large percentage of rural community colleges draw their student populations from the surrounding rural communities, offering courses specifically designed to tackle certain inherent problems and issues in the host rural community.

Study abroad programs offer the best opportunity for students from rural community colleges to study in other countries and to experience cultural interaction and integration outside of the academic setting. Rural community colleges seeking support for building study abroad programs face the challenge of convincing campus stakeholders and the local that study abroad programs are beneficial for the comprehensive concept of community,

linking geographic context while expanding beyond geographical borders (Raby, 2012). In spite of the fact that international experiences are known to promote students' intercultural sensitivity, employability, and academic achievements, few community college students go abroad during their studies. This points to a lack of awareness amongst members of the community regarding the potential benefits of studying abroad for students as well as for the extended community (Begin-Caouette, Angers, & Niflis, 2015).

Background of the Problem

Study abroad programs have been identified by Kuh (2008) as a "high-impact" educational activity, with other researchers acknowledging it as an integral element of the American undergraduate experience (Long, Vogelaar & Hale, 2014). According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA, 2017), the number of U.S. students studying abroad for credit during the 2014-2015 academic year grew 304,467 students to 313,415 students, a 2.9% increase over the previous year and a four-fold increase over 20 years. Despite the increase in popularity of study abroad programs, the vast majority of study abroad participants come from four-year institutions. In the 2014-2015 academic year, community college students only accounted for 1.8% of the total number of American study-abroad participants (IIE, 2016).

Community colleges educate nearly half of the nation's undergraduate students. As a result, community colleges have begun to play a more important role in preparing students to work and thrive in a globalized society. Through the offer of academic curricula that incorporate cultural integration and accommodation as fundamental concepts, community colleges address the need for a globally astute workforce (Manns, 2014). For all campuses, including community colleges, internationalization is increasingly becoming a central issue of concern, touching directly on questions of social and curricular relevance, institutional quality and prestige, national competitiveness, and innovation potential (Rumbley, Altbach,

& Reisberg, 2012). Community colleges are labeled as being “democracy’s colleges” because of the broad access to higher education they provide (Diekhoff, 1950). Many of these community colleges do not offer opportunities for students to engage in study abroad. As a result, many of the minority students and low-income students served at community colleges are excluded from the types of international programs that are accessible at other institutions of higher education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Many community college students do not go on to transfer four-year institutions, increasing the need for community colleges to incorporate important programs, including study abroad, into their mission of educating students beyond walls and borders.

In theory, such programs create a more marketable workforce. Employers are not primarily concerned with where the potential employees went to school, but are instead concerned with practical issues regarding the abilities of their potential employees to perform in the intended workforce capacities, including the increasingly global market. Therefore, despite their rural settings, community college graduates are increasingly globally connected in terms of their employment possibilities. The community college may be the only formal educational opportunity for these students to develop global literacy (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

Students at community colleges often struggle with academic program completion, academic tenacity, and persistence (Young, 2008). Study abroad programs are known to promote academic success, academic program retention (Raby et al., 2014), cultural awareness (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009), and personal and professional growth (Younes & Asay, 2003). In other words, study abroad programs develop the skills and qualities that are beneficial to students as well as to their colleges and communities.

Short-term study abroad is defined as student travel that is less than eight weeks in duration (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Short-term study abroad programs are often more affordable than longer-term programs, fitting within the mission and curriculum for

community colleges. Approximately 57% of all study abroad programs are short-term programs. Nationally, 70% of existing community college study-abroad programs are short-term programs that last only two weeks (IIE, 2011). The two-week duration is ideal for community colleges, since such programs can be inserted easily into curriculums and schedules without being burdensome to the college, faculty, staff, and students.

The United States has one of the largest racially and ethnically diverse populations anywhere in the world (Smith, 2011). Due to the evident cultural diversity in this country, there is an emphasis on globalization and internationalization in higher education. Colleges and institutions of higher learning are being asked to demonstrate competence in cultural awareness and globalization as an accreditation standard (Rumbley et al., 2012). There is an increasing need for education programs aimed at creating a diverse society and a more-interconnected world (Altbach, 2011). Today's students must build cultural knowledge and be able to articulate that knowledge in order to be competitive in the workforce (Smith, 2011). Community colleges have a significant role to play in advancing the internationalization of U.S. education. It is important emphasize the fact that the socio-academic environment plays a vital role in determining the impact of education on learners. Therefore, this researcher will refer to the constructivism theory, which elaborates on the relationship between the learning process and the environment. In order to increase the ability of American students to integrate with, accommodate to, and work freely with other cultures, they must be exposed during their college years to environments that build their cultural interaction abilities.

Community Colleges in the United States and Sustainability

The United States offers many types of postsecondary education. The community college represents a noteworthy form that was once unique to the United States, but is becoming known and established in other countries as well. Community colleges, sometimes

referred to as junior colleges, are two-year schools that provide affordable postsecondary education as a pathway to a four-year degree. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2015), 1,167 community colleges in the United States enroll more than 12.4 million students and serve almost half of all undergraduate students in the United States. Many of these community colleges are Student and Exchange Visitor Program certified, and all have nationally-recognized accreditation. Community colleges offer distinct learning environments and are recognized as having smaller class sizes, more individualized attention, and supportive cultures (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007).

Sustainability, on the other hand, is defined as the ability to continue a demarcated behavior indefinitely (Altbach, 2011). Hence, from the perspective of community colleges, sustainability refers to the capability of offering education programs that can be continued in four-year institutions. Community college graduates, like graduates from four-year institutions, qualify for employment in the American labor market. Nevertheless, education programs offered at the community college level can be pursued at four-year institutions (Long et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

A considerable quantity of research has been aimed at delineating the impact of studying abroad for four-year institutions (O'Connor, Farnsworth & Utley, 2013; Raby, 2012; Younes & Asay, 2003). However, few researchers have documented the study abroad experiences of community college students. Considerably fewer studies have addressed the reasons for the low rates of community college participation in study abroad programs or the ways that the situation could be improved (Robertson, 2015). Furthermore, research on the impact of study abroad participation on rural community colleges in the United States has been practically non-existent. For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined rural community colleges as those publicly controlled community colleges located in vast

geographical areas, serving widely-dispersed community populations of fewer than 100,000 citizens (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007; Vineyard, 1979). Rural community college students make up an increasing proportion of the community college population and overall secondary education population; with approximately 34% of community college students attending rural campuses (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). Research has suggested that although study abroad programs are potentially beneficial for all undergraduates, study abroad may be particularly valuable for members of underserved populations, including lower income and minority students (Raby, 2007). Kuh (2008) emphasized the value of studying abroad for a diverse body of participants, stating that “historically underserved students tend to benefit more from engaging in purposeful educational activities than majority students” (p. 17). Community colleges are more likely to enroll students from populations that are traditionally underserved by higher education in the United States. Students of color, students from non-dominant groups (women, for example), and students with physical disabilities or learning disabilities are more likely to enroll in community colleges than in four-year institutions (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

Internationalization at the community college level is an issue of equity and educational access. There is a need to demonstrate the transformative potential of studying abroad while attending two-year institutions (Kuh, 2008). In theory, such programs are as important and beneficial for students at two-year institutions as they are for students at four-year institutions. However, in the absence of a formal quantitative understanding of the benefits of study abroad programs for students at two-year institutions, international education will continue to hold a peripheral position at community colleges. As a result, underserved populations will remain excluded from study abroad programs (Cohen et al., 2014). There is, therefore, a growing need for community college students who do not go on to attend four-year institutions to be provided with opportunities to take part in study abroad

programs that help them cultivate global literacy (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Thus, there is a direct need for study abroad programs to be made accessible to these students – a step that would be best facilitated by the community colleges that serve them.

Community college students have only recently begun to take advantage of the study abroad opportunities that enhance their global education and knowledge of the international climate, a necessity in today's interdependent business world (Begin-Caouette et al., 2015). In fact, study abroad participation has more than tripled over the past two decades, according to the IIE (2016). In the 2014-15 academic year, a total of 313,415 U.S. students participated in study abroad programs. Despite the overall increase in participation by college students, however, participation by students attending community colleges continues to be significantly lower, with only 2.3% of study abroad participants coming from community colleges. According to IIE's (2016) Open Doors report, universities that offer study-abroad programs had 306,310 of students participate in the study abroad opportunities provided during the 2014-2015 year. However, during that same year, only 7,105 community college students took advantage of the study-abroad program offered by their institutions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine, understand, and describe the development of successful short-term study abroad experiences at rural community colleges. The impact of the rural community colleges, on the most immediate community in which it resides, is more pronounced than when compared to other community colleges that are not located in rural settings. When the rural community colleges are empowered, the surrounding communities are empowered. In many cases, the empowerment of other non-rural community colleges may either require longer to be expressed or may not impact the college and its surroundings as significantly.

The researcher employed a qualitative survey, interviews with leaders of community college short-term study abroad programs, and a process of document analysis.

Research Foci

The research focus was on a single, overarching research question: How can rural community colleges develop successful and sustainable study abroad experiences? The question included three sub questions as follows:

1. What skills and characteristics are required in a study abroad leader at a rural community college?
2. What senior administrative support is required for a successful and sustainable study abroad program, at a rural community college?
3. What are the barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad experiences at rural community colleges? How have successful programs overcome these barriers?

Significance of Study

This study was significant for multiple reasons. First, through this study, the researcher contributed to the sparse existing literature regarding study abroad initiatives at the community college level, and more specifically at rural community colleges. Second, the study yielded data and findings applicable for the colleges that are being asked to demonstrate competence in cultural awareness and globalization as an accreditation standard. Third, the researcher confirmed existing findings regarding the benefits that students receive from participation in study abroad programs (IIE, 2009), demonstrating the benefits to community colleges that would result from increased levels of engagement and higher participant retention. Finally, through this study, the researcher documented the benefits of study abroad programs for individual participants as well as for communities as a whole.

Such documented benefits provide supporting evidence on various fronts that can be used to create awareness and garner financial support for study abroad programs.

Overview of Methodology

The researcher employed a qualitative approach for addressing the research foci, relying on a three-pronged methodology that included semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. Using data triangulation, applying different methods, and examining diverse perspectives enabled the researcher to produce more comprehensive findings and produce trustworthiness in the data collected from this research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

To investigate faculty leaders at various community colleges, the researcher primarily relied on analyzing the experiences of community college faculty and staff members involved in organizing and facilitating study abroad trips at their institutions. Methods such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews were employed to gather relevant and personalized information. All interviews were conducted either by telephone or in person, with interviews continued until data saturation was established. Through interview responses, the researcher investigated the subject matter, analyzing the experiences of individuals involved in leading and promoting study abroad programs. The researcher used the focus group and semi-structured interview techniques to pose follow-up questions that elicited a deeper understanding of themes of interest (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). In addition, the researcher examined all institutional websites for the colleges attended by participants in order to determine whether vision, mission, value statements, recruitment, and marketing efforts reflected participation levels and support of the study abroad programs.

Delimitations

Creswell (2013) defined delimitations of a research study as those elements that set confines for and limit the scope of a study. This current research study was delimited to (a)

rural community college faculty and staff group leaders who had participated in short-term study abroad programs, (b) community college faculty and staff members who had unsuccessfully attempted to lead short-term study abroad programs, (c) other community college faculty and staff members who wished to lead short-term study abroad in the future, and (d) regional constraints. The researcher collected study data through a qualitative methodology, using interviews with sampled respondents from rural community colleges.

Definitions of Key Terms

Administrative support: Administrative support is defined as help or assistance relating to administrative issues or matters (Salisbury, Twombly, Tumanut, & Klute, 2013).

Community college: Community colleges, sometimes referred to as junior colleges, are two-year schools that provide affordable postsecondary education as a pathway to a four-year degree (AACC, 2015).

Four-year institutions: Four-year institution is a collective term used to refer to those institutions of higher learning that provide a four-year program of education and training to students, typically culminating in a bachelor's degree (Salisbury, 2016).

Global citizenship: The term global citizenship referse to “students who, variously and in combination, have had exposure to other cultures, possess foreign language skills, have tolerance for those whose cultural backgrounds are different from their own, display a sense of curiosity about the world beyond their immediate experiences, are adept at navigating in unfamiliar circumstances, and show empathy for others” (Picard et al., 2009, p. 7).

Globalization: Globalization is “a social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social, and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding, and in which people act accordingly” (Waters, 2001, p. 5).

Internationalization: Knight (2003) provided a widely used definition of internationalization as: “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 2).

Rural community college: A rural community college is a two-year, publicly controlled institution located in a wide geographical area serving a community population of 100,000 citizens or fewer and with a comprehensive educational program (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007; Vineyard, 1979).

Short-term study abroad programs: In a short-term study-abroad program, students travel to other countries for fewer than eight weeks (Salisbury et al., 2013).

Study abroad leader: A study abroad leader is the individual who is in charge of planning, coordination, and implementation of study abroad programs (Salisbury et al., 2013).

Sustainable: Sustainable is the condition of being able to be maintained at a certain rate or level (Waters, 2001, p. 10).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize and examine pertinent literature related to this research. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) the mission of community colleges, (b) the historical context of study abroad at community colleges, (c) the rationale for deploying study abroad programs at community colleges, (d) study abroad leaders, (e) senior administrative support for study abroad programs, (f) student experiences (g) benefits of short-term study abroad through community colleges, (f) barriers of short-term study abroad at community colleges, (g) future directions, and (h) concluding material.

Study Abroad Programs in Community Colleges

The specific missions of individual community colleges vary across institutions, but the overarching mission of the community college model is to make postsecondary education widely accessible (Baime & Baum, 2016). Raby (2008) stated that community colleges had three missions: (a) to provide educational preparation for students who wish to transfer to four-year institutions, (b) to provide vocational and technical training useful to those looking to enter the workforce, and (c) to promote lifelong learning through continuing education, community service, and English as a second language instruction for recent immigrants.

In this new era of increased globalization, U.S. citizens must be prepared to participate in a global economy, with such preparations coming through mediums including vocational training, lifelong learning, or preparation for enrollment in a four-year institution (Treat & Hagedorn, 2013). Programs that contribute to this preparation are therefore a logical extension of the community-college model. Study abroad represents an important initiative for helping this country's students gain increased knowledge of international affairs and gain valuable cross-cultural experiences. The IIE (2018) indicated that ranks of U.S.

students studying abroad have increased 46% over the last 10 years. Though widely seen as essential to the four-year institution, study abroad programs remain on the periphery of missions of two-year institutions (Raby et al., 2014). Most four-year institutions have a research-oriented mission, whereas community colleges are focused more on meeting commitments and obligations within the communities they serve (Raby, 2012). The research-oriented mission of four-year institutions draws a natural line of accretion toward study abroad programs, which provide opportunities for learning research skills and conducting research beyond the opportunities available within a single institution. In contrast, community colleges are characterized by an inherently local focus on the specific communities they serve.

Community colleges face the challenge of garnering support for study abroad programs before moving on to create and implement them. In order to gain the required support, the schools must convince communities that study abroad programs are of benefit to the community at large. Key to this process is increasing the scope of what it means to be a community. In a reimagined context, the meaning of community would shift from denoting a specified boundary surrounding the college to encompassing a more comprehensive concept of community that goes beyond local geography to link contextual borders to the geographic borders (Raby, 2012). The international experience is said to promote students' intercultural sensitivity, employability, and academic achievements, but few community college students go abroad during their studies to reap these benefits (Begin-Caouette et al., 2015).

Thirty-six percent of U.S. undergraduate students attended public and private two-year colleges in fall 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Thus, community colleges have begun to play a more important role in preparing students to work and thrive in a globalized society. For all campuses, including community colleges, internationalization is becoming a central issue of concern that touches directly on questions of social and curricular

relevance, institutional quality and prestige, national competitiveness, and innovation potential (Rumbley et al., 2012). The new “buzz phrase” on many campuses is “global citizenship.” Global citizenship is defined as “students who, variously and in combination, have had exposure to other cultures, possess foreign language skills, have tolerance for those whose cultural backgrounds are different from their own, display a sense of curiosity about the world beyond their immediate experiences, are adept at navigating in unfamiliar circumstances, and show empathy for others” (Picard et al., 2009, p. 7).

It is prudent to solicit support for study abroad programs from the entire community. Most organizations are taking a global approach toward remaining relevant in the current competitive business world. Skills such as cross-cultural management and knowledge of international relations are valuable and affect overall employee performance. Study abroad programs offer the best opportunity for students to get exposed to and learn about such matters before joining the industry. Globalization is persistent, inevitable, and unavoidable. Enlightening the local community to think along such lines is the best way to foster support for study abroad programs (AACC, 2015).

Community colleges have been labeled as “democracy’s colleges” because they open broader access to higher education (Diekhoff, 1950). However, not all community colleges offer opportunities for students to engage in study abroad. As a result, many of the minority and low-income students served at community colleges are often excluded from international programs accessible at other higher education institutions (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Rural community colleges have numerous institutional challenges, demographic variables, and economic conditions within their communities that often leave students with greater obstacles and with fewer chances to travel abroad (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). Many community college students do not go on to transfer into four-year institutions to pursue bachelor’s degrees. Thus, community colleges may be the only formal educational

opportunities through which such students could develop global literacy (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

Students at community colleges often struggle with completion and persistence (Young, 2008). Study abroad programs are known to promote academic success (Raby et al., 2014), retention (Raby et al., 2014), cultural awareness (Clarke et al., 2009), and personal and professional growth (Younes & Asay, 2003). All of those areas would be of benefit to community college students and the communities those schools are part of. Short-term study abroad programs are often more affordable and fit best with the community college framework. Short-term study abroad programs are generally defined as being those involving up to eight weeks of travel to another country (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

The United States has one of the most racially and ethnically diverse populations in the world (Smith, 2011). Due to increased diversity, there is an emphasis on globalization and internationalization in higher education (Rumbley et al., 2012), as well as increasing emphasis on creating a diverse society and a more-interconnected world (Altbach, 2011). Students will need to build their cultural knowledge in order to be competitive (Smith, 2011).

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism is a theory used to explain how individuals acquire knowledge and make sense of the world. Reality is often viewed both objectively and subjectively. The theory of constructivism emerged from developmental and cognitive psychology, with its central figures including Bruner (1990), Kelly (1955), Piaget (1973), and von Glasersfeld (1993). Constructivism is concerned with the individual rather than with the group, asking questions regarding how we know what we know and how we develop meaning (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Charmaz, 2008; Young & Collin, 2004). According to Ültanir (2012), constructivism is a process whereby the learner is actively involved in making sense of the world.

According to constructivism theorists, individuals construct their understanding and knowledge of the world around them through their daily experiences as well as through their reflections on those experiences (Andrews, 2012). When individuals come across something new within their environments, they attempt to reconcile the new encounters with previous ideas and experiences, often changing previously-held notions and perceptions or discarding the new experiences as irrelevant. (Ferrari & Fine, 2016). Hence, human beings are regarded as active creators of their knowledge. However, according to constructivist theory, one must ask questions, explore and assess what he or she initially knows in order to create new knowledge (Piaget, 1973).

Due to the personal freedom associated with constructivism, the theory has continuously been misconstrued as a learning theory that encourages people to reinvent the wheel. The truth of the matter, however, is that constructivism capitalizes on one's innate curiosity about the functionality of things in the world to create an understanding (Young & Collin, 2004). The learning process is then completed by applying existing knowledge and real-world experience, by learning to hypothesize, by testing theories, and by drawing conclusions from findings. Hence, constructivists regard learning as an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than as a process for acquiring it. Knowledge is constructed based upon personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment. As a result, learners continuously test these hypotheses through social negotiation (Charmaz, 2008). Apparently, each learner has a different interpretation and construction of knowledge process and cannot be taken for a blank slate – instead, he or she brings past experiences and cultural factors to bear on situations (Charmaz, 2008).

A common misconception relating to constructivism is that instructors should never tell learners anything directly but, instead, should always allow them to construct knowledge for themselves (von Glasersfeld, 1993). This is confusing pedagogy (teaching) with

knowing. Constructivism assumes that all knowledge is constructed from the learner's previous knowledge, regardless of how that individual is taught. Thus, even listening to a lecture involves active attempts to construct new knowledge.

Constructivism Theory and Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad programs are designed to offer academic studies through exposure and interaction. Constructivists insist that knowledge is gained through experience with one's environment and the reactionary responses to that environment. Study abroad programs, therefore, expose students to different learning and cultural environments that encompass different people, components, cultural practices, and approaches to academic work. In study abroad programs, learning takes place both inside the classroom and outside of the classroom (Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). Any student taking part in the program is not only expected to build on his or her academic knowledge, but also to exhibit reactionary responses that to the foreign environment and to enable constructive interactions with the components of the environment. In fact, the concepts of globalization and cultural interaction that have been largely associated with study abroad programs can best be explained by the theory of constructivism (Berg et al., 2012).

History of Four-Year Institutions

Students wishing to continue their education after high school may join a four-year institution for a bachelor's degree or enroll in a two-year institution for an associate's degree. Two-year institutions of higher education offer students an opportunity to enter their careers almost immediately. However, four-year institutions were established particularly to accommodate students who wish to acquire well-rounded educations in a much broader ranges of study (Zhang, 2011).

The four-year institution is a collective term used to refer to all institutions of higher learning that offer education and training to students over a period of time typically lasting

four years and culminating in a bachelor's degree. In the United States, college and university programs begin in the 13th year of learning, just after high school. Although two-year institutions offer associate's degree and certificates, four-year institutions strictly offer bachelor's degree programs in undergraduate schools (Zhang, 2011).

The academic programs in four-year institutions are designed to offer learning opportunities for students both on- and off-campus. Unlike two-year institutions that are designed to train students to meet specific job requirements, undergraduates from four-year institutions are highly flexible, having acquired knowledge and experiences on a wide range of subjects (Zhang, 2011). Despite these benefits of four-year institutions, potential students cite cost as the primary limiting factor for entry into those programs. The average cost of tuition and fees for the 2017–2018 academic year was found to be \$34,740 at private four-year colleges, with residential tuition at public colleges totaling \$9,970 for the year, and out-of-state tuition at public colleges totaling \$25,620 per year (College Board, 2017).

Study abroad programs were not initially incorporated into most syllabi for four-year colleges. Eventually, it dawned on many curriculum developers that globalization and cultural integration should be included in the four-year course of study (Peterson, 2007). Similarly, due to the competitiveness of the job market, employers do not only review undergraduate qualification, seeking instead to recruit well-rounded candidates who are flexible enough to fit into any society.

Historical Context of Study Abroad at Community Colleges

Although it may seem that community colleges play a marginal role in global education, the concept of global citizenship has continued to grow. Raby and Valeau (2007) identified four major eras of this expansion, denoting them as follows: (a) recognition (1967-1984), (b) expansion and publication (1980-1990), (c) augmentation (1990-2000), and (d) institutionalization (2000-2007). In addition to these four major eras, an emergence of study

abroad organizations has strengthened the development of study abroad programs at community colleges.

The recognition period began in the late 1960s, during which time several community colleges began international programs. The first study abroad office opened at Rockland Community College in New York in 1969. California community colleges pioneered the first faculty-led study abroad program (Raby & Valeau, 2007). In 1976, a nonprofit and nongovernmental organization called Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) was founded to promote competent and globally engaging learning environments. In 1985, the California Colleges for International Education (CCIE) was founded as a nonprofit educational consortium with the mission of promoting international understanding through education (Anayah, 2012). Another important organization founded during this era, advocating for global competency, was the American Council on International and Intercultural Education (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

The second period was designated as expansion and publication, spanning years from 1980 through 1990. At that point, some publications began to arise indicating that American students were internationally illiterate (Raby & Valeau, 2007). In response to these claims, community colleges began to actively seek funding that would allow their institutions to provide and promote international curricula (Raby and Valeau, 2007). During this period, the number of state and local associations grew significantly, and many international offices began to open at community colleges. Several directives were developed specifically to promote the development of these international programs at the community college level.

The third era, identified as augmentation, began in 1990 and progressed through the early 2000s. During this period, community colleges began to strengthen and improve their existing international programs. Raby and Valeau (2007) stated that during this period, many community colleges were actively trying to increase their international student enrollment.

The University of Hawaii's Asian Studies Institute and UCLA's Teaching Training International Seminars were implemented to provide professional development for community college faculty by encouraging them to develop international courses (Raby and Valeau, 2007). Raby and Valeau (2007) mentioned two relevant surveys completed during this era that demonstrate the progress of the development of community colleges international programs. One study, conducted in 1992 by the American Council of Education, revealed that of the 60 randomly selected community colleges, nearly half offered some study abroad programs or internationalized classes. The second study, completed by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2001, revealed that nearly 80% of the 1,171 colleges surveyed offered study abroad programs of some type (Blair, Phinney, & Phillippe, 2001).

Institutionalization is the era identified from 2000 through the present. Raby and Valeau (2007) described this as the period during which we began to see community colleges add the concept of internationalization and globalization to their mission statements. The Institute of International Education (2018) notes how the number of study-abroad programs at the community college level continued to grow each year. Raby and Valeau's (2007) historical perspective demonstrates the significant growth and expansion that the community college has experienced over the past 50 years. If these trends continue, one can expect to see more participation and interest in study abroad programs at the community college level in the future.

Treat and Hagedorn (2013) have recently identified an emerging trend in community college curricula that may be characterized as a fifth era. These authors argued that globalization is being integrated increasingly into the community college model, with international education beginning as an add-on, becoming a choice, and gradually emerging as a fully integrated and central component of community colleges' missions (Treat & Hagedorn, 2013). The past few decades has seen an emergence of study abroad organizations

that have helped to strengthen the growth of study abroad programs at community colleges. The CCID, American Council on International and Intercultural Education (ACIIE), the Center for Global Advancement of Community Colleges (CGACC), the Stanley Foundation, and the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, among other groups, have all played an essential role in advancing community college study abroad programs.

The CCID was founded by Dr. Max King at Brevard Community College in 1976, during an era known to be especially supportive of international education, particularly at community colleges. The CCID was established under the rationale that a consortium of community colleges could more effectively development international opportunities than could single colleges on their own. The CCID's (2017) advocacy was based on the premise that communities depended on their local community colleges to promote economic development and that these local colleges needed to produce a "globally competent and competitive workforce." CCID's mission was to produce students who were culturally competent and to create faculties that were knowledgeable and willing to establish curriculum and a global perspective. The CCID (2017), insisted that "leadership and governance must ensure that policy reflects global trends."

In 2007, the CCID merged with the ACIIE to address the fact that the two organizations were duplicating one another's efforts and that the cost of membership in two similar organizations was becoming prohibitive for many community colleges (Frost, 2007). Before merging with the CCID, the ACCIE had been a key player in the internationalization of community colleges. One of this organization's most notable contributions was joining with the Stanley Foundation to co-sponsor and produce the Arlie conferences. These conferences began in 1993 and were known for propagating international programming at community colleges and arranging state and federal support for community colleges to

sponsor international education. The ACCIE also promoted a stronger relationship with the AACC and with federal agencies that endorsed international education (Frost, 2007).

Another critical group dedicated to promoting global education at community colleges is the CGACC. This non-profit organization advocates at the federal level for post-secondary institutions to initiate partnership opportunities with global organizations and provides community colleges with direction for facing their internationalization undertakings (Smith, 2008). The Stanley Foundation (2017) has a similar but more general mission, seeking to “advance multilateral action to create fair, just, and lasting solutions to critical issues of peace and security.” This non-profit and non-partisan organization works with policymakers and community members to sustain international peace. The group is well known for providing materials and resources that educate teachers and communities about international conflicts and terrorist attacks and for providing online systems that permit educators to share resources (Stanley Foundation, 2017).

The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) was founded in 1948 and is currently the world’s largest non-profit organization committed exclusively to advancing international higher education. This organization has played an integral role, serving as the voice for international education and exchange. The group’s primary goal is to create an environment all students and scholars who wish to study abroad will be able to find a path to do so. NAFSA currently has 10,000 members among more than 3,500 institutions in more than 150 countries (NAFSA, 2017). Collaboratively, these global education organizations have promoted and supported the study abroad efforts of community colleges across the United States.

Current Travel Trends of Community College Study Abroad Participants

Even though interest in study abroad is growing at the postsecondary level, the number of community college students participating in these opportunities remains relatively

small. According to a report released by the IIE (2015), fewer than 2% of those students who studied abroad were from community colleges. These numbers are discouraging because community college students make up more than a third of all the undergraduate students in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The study abroad participants were more diverse than study abroad participants from four-year institutions, however, with just under 30% of the overall participation rate consisting of minority students, and approximately 65% being female (IIE, 2015). Community college students were more likely than their counterparts at four-year institutions to study in Latin American countries such as Cuba and Costa Rica (28% vs. 15%) and were less likely to travel to Europe – 46% versus 55% (IIE, 2015). The number one study-abroad destination for community college students was Italy, with 13% traveling to this destination (IIE, 2015). Other popular destinations for students at two-year institutions were the United Kingdom and the European countries of Spain and France. Community college students are most likely to participate in short-term study abroad programs, given the difficulty of generating sufficient levels of awareness and buy-in to successfully fund long-term programs. In addition, many community colleges have not fully incorporated study-abroad programs into their academic curricula and would require additional time to gradually make the necessary changes to programs and curricula to accommodate long-term study-abroad programs. Instantly incorporating long-term study abroad programs would impact academic calendars and scheduling. Community colleges require time to slowly but steadily elongate the study abroad program durations in community colleges.

Rationale for Study Abroad at Community Colleges

Four principal rationales driving decisions in the field of higher education are political, academic, economic, and humanist in nature. These four rationales help justify the creation, implementation, and support of study abroad to college policies and practices

(Green, 2007). As Green (2007) explained, the above rationales foreshadow and forecast sociopolitical and economic globalization trends, which in turn have direct application to community colleges. Although international education has not always been recognized as an important element of the community college, several reasons exist to integrate study abroad into two-year institutions. Besides the rationales, the contributions of study abroad leaders can also help emphasize the importance of study abroad programs at Community colleges.

The first rationale, the political rationale, emerged during the Cold War and continued to the post-September 11 era relating international education to the idea of national security (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Several government grants use this rationale to back curricular changes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, as well as business, language, and cultural classes (Raby & Valeau, 2007). The ideology behind the political rationale is that traveling permits you to meet people from other cultures and experience foreign countries first hand. This travel breaks down stereotypes and encourages individuals to listen more and judge less (Rice, 2006). Community college students have many barriers that prevent them from going abroad (Green, 2007). The open access ideology of community colleges allows community colleges to offer study abroad programs to a broad spectrum of students who may not have had this opportunity elsewhere.

The second rationale, the academic integrity rationale, suggests that classes that do not incorporate universal and global themes are incomplete. For example, if you are a nursing major, it will be important to understand the impact of migration and the transmission of disease. If you study environmental biology, it is necessary to comprehend the effects of deforestation, pollution, and other environmental issues globally. Community colleges have always viewed their mission as a holistic approach encompassing personal experiences, community involvement, and lifelong learning. For community colleges to embrace the

study abroad experience, they must see global literacy and experiential education as part of the lifelong learning process (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

The third rationale, the economic rationale, has two applications: linking international education to job skills needed to remain competitive in a global world economy and emphasizing the entrepreneurial and profit margins from international academic programs. According to the Committee for Economic Development (2006), as cited in Raby & Valeau (2007), the lack of international literacy skills places the United States in a less competitive position in the global economy. As Raby and Valeau (2007) mentioned, “Community colleges would be remissive if they did not prepare their students to work, compete, and thrive in this new era” (p. 176). The Committee for Economic Development (2006) contended that international literacy skills are not only necessary for this country’s war on terrorism but also to compete in a global market where 80% of jobs have international aspects. Based on this rationale, one could ascertain that promoting global competency at the community college level can support the local and national economy.

The last rationale, the humanist rationale, stresses cultural diversity and tolerance. This rationale suggests that internationalization teaches students how to understand conflicting ideologies and relate to numerous viewpoints (Raby & Valeau, 2007). The hope is that exposure to diversity will promote greater tolerance and peace. An internationally literate student will be a more culturally competent and empathetic citizen (Raby & Valeau, 2007). This competency will have a lasting impact on the community where many of these community college students reside. International education at the community college level results in greater understanding of marginalized cultures and increased awareness of how globalization unequally affects health, economic, and labor conditions of people in developing nations (Levin, 2002). All four of these rationales form the valued groundwork for study abroad programs at the community college.

Study Abroad Leaders

Study abroad leaders have been instrumental in the creation of awareness as well as facilitation of study abroad programs. Study abroad leaders are a collective term used to refer to all people involved in ensuring the success of study abroad programs. Typical study abroad programs are led by the respective faculty and staff members in the various colleges (Raby, 2007). The main responsibilities of any study abroad team leader include evaluating the program as designed to ensure that it meets the core objectives set by the faculty or staff member (Green, 2007). Another major responsibility of the study abroad leader is to ensure the welfare of the students in the study abroad programs. Finally, program leaders also must take part in the process of selecting the various students to be included in the study abroad programs (Cressey, 2004).

Leading a study abroad experience is a challenging task requiring resilience, flexibility, and approachability (Cohen et al., 2014). All the students' grievances with regard to accommodation, learning environment, and general upkeep in the various locations will be channeled to the study abroad team leader. Hence, a study abroad leader works closely with other members of the faculty, senior administrative staff, and program facilitators to ensure that such programs transfer smoothly to the end and that students gain maximally from the same (Raby, 2008).

Senior Administrative Staff

Senior administrative staff members such as deans, presidents, and vice presidents play three crucial roles in the execution of the study abroad programs. The initial role of the senior administrative staff is to approve the content and budget of the study abroad programs. After different stakeholders have deliberated and agreed on the content and objectives of the programs, it is the responsibility of the senior administrative staff to approve the deliberations to make them binding (Green, 2007). Senior administrative staff members are also

responsible for the budgeting and allocation of resources for the study abroad programs.

Most short-term study abroad programs run for two weeks, with senior administrative staff members being responsible for ensuring that resources are available to ensure the smooth running of the intended programs (Green, 2007).

Another crucial role played by the senior staff members is the establishment of relationships with other community colleges where students are expected to take part in the study abroad programs (Green, 2007). Study abroad programs are typically implemented as exchange programs in which students may be required to move from either side and not necessarily from the United States going abroad. Hence, senior staff members are responsible for identifying colleges abroad and to partner with them to engage in potential exchange programs.

Student Experiences

Depending on the place, program, and the nature of the study abroad programs, students report back regarding their experiences after completion of the program, reporting both negative and positive feedback brought by students who take part in study abroad programs (Raby, 2007). According to Raby et al. (2014), some students fail to adjust and fit into the new environment due to cultural clashes or mild hostility from a section of the host country. Since such experiences affect the general, academic performance of the students in the program, it is highly expected that such students will give the program a negative rating. On the other side, students who quickly adjust to the prevailing environment abroad often give positive feedback. Regardless of the nature of the students' experiences, all forms of feedback are taken seriously by the faculty with a view of using the same to suggest improvement adjustments in the program (Raby et al., 2014). Hence, while taking part in the program students are encouraged to give as much feedback as they can and to remain sincere in all their experiences.

One of the expected feedbacks, in this case, is improved academic performance. According to Donnelly-Smith (2009), students who take part in study abroad programs often develop an analytical and critical mind which helps them in understanding concepts that might have initially sounded abstract. Hence, one of the feedbacks from a successful study abroad program is improved academic performance. Similarly, students who take part in study abroad programs are also expected to exhibit strengthened interpersonal skills, especially in interacting with their peers. One of the expectations of the facilitators of the study abroad programs is that the participants ought to not only learn about but also develop cross-cultural survival strategies. Hence, on return, such students are expected to exhibit such development in the manner in which they interact with their peers from different cultures.

Outcomes of Short-term Study Abroad at Community Colleges

In examining short-term study-abroad programs at the community college level, there are many obvious benefits to the students and the community. Short-term programs are increasing in popularity for various reasons: (a) they are less expensive than longer programs; (b) they tend to be more adaptable to students' academic schedules; and (c) they appeal to students who may not want to be away for an extended period (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Even though shorter programs may not offer all the advantages that longer programs offer, studies show that participating in study-abroad programs of any length can promote global awareness that might not have otherwise been possible (Levin, 2002). Short-term study-abroad programs tend to be a perfect fit for a two-year community college schedule. The following section will discuss the benefits of study abroad programs to community colleges as well as to the community college students.

Sustainability of Study Abroad Programs

Internationalization of education is increasingly becoming a priority among higher education institutions (Dvorak, Christiansen, Fischer, & Underhill, 2011; Yemini & Giladi, 2015). The integration of international themes into college education aims to equip students with necessary skills to succeed in a globalized environment (Dvorak et al., 2011). Although there internationalizing the curriculum is considered important in developing students, there are differences in the strategies and the challenges that come along with it (Yemini & Giladi, 2015). Globalization of education provides a myriad of opportunities for students to be involved in social work (Fisher & Grettenberger 2015). The two most common challenges in the integration of global or international perspective into the curriculum are (a) a commitment to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout teaching, research and service missions, and (b) faculty inexperience (Leask, 2015). Thus, sustainability of study abroad programs is imperative in fostering international relationships through education.

Sustainability of education abroad entails a critical look into its impact on the socio-economic and financial dimensions, corporate social responsibility, and the academia (Dvorak et al., 2011; Fisher & Grettenberger 2015; Reilly, McGrath, & Reilly, 2016). Fisher and Grettenberger (2015) posited that while it is laudable effort to send students abroad for immersion, the focus should be on the capability of education abroad programs to foster engagement with host communities. However, the structure of education abroad programs can be limiting in terms of deepening cultural understanding and awareness and perpetuating power plays in social work (Fisher & Grettenberger 2015). This socio-economic disproportion can undermine the meaningful experiences and learnings that can be obtained through the program. Adopting a community-based participatory model, especially for short-term programs, provides meaningful social work education and can potentially address the power imbalances in such settings (Fisher & Grettenberger, 2015).

As a pedagogical tool, education abroad approaches comprise of ethical considerations inherent in non-Western and global contexts (Parmentier & Moore, 2016). To be sustainable, the end goal of education programs should be, first and foremost, to recognize the complexity of civic engagement and break the narrow vantage point of view of study abroad participants (Fisher & Grettenberger, 2015; Parmentier & Moore, 2016). Because oftentimes study abroad programs are limited within a certain period, there is risk that the experiences are not as meaningful as what was intended (Dvorak et al., 2011; Fisher & Grettenberger, 2015). Awareness does not only entail being knowledgeable about a certain culture, but more importantly, it is about recognizing ethical dilemmas, social and political barriers and challenges, and one's position in the greater cultural context (Parmentier & Moore, 2016).

Internationalization of education is also understood as a way through which students are recruited to be acculturated with a host country's culture (Patel & Lynch, 2013). The central focus is on "globalization", which pertains to a campaign for a positive learning experience through critical exchange of political, social, and academic issues (Patel & Lynch, 2013). Sustainability of study abroad and exchange programs implies embedding social work framed within a learning context. This suggests that academia has a vital role in ensuring that these learning spaces are respectful and welcoming of differences of views (Patel & Lynch, 2013). However, study abroad programs are still a new trend in the global education sector, and factors relating to its sustainability is still being contested (Patel & Lynch, 2013). Thus, it is critical to understand how student abroad programs are being sustained not only among higher education institutions, but also in the rural community colleges.

Study Abroad and Community Colleges

Global education is an important component of the comprehensive curriculum of the modern community college. This is a cross-curriculum component that involves educating

students, local businesspeople, local elected officials, and others about living, conducting business, and prospering in a global economy. Global education encompasses inter-cultural awareness as well as the how to compete in the emerging global economy. This is particularly important in rural areas. As a result, most colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies, which may address global cultural diversity often, explore “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Hence, study abroad programs are largely perceived as part of the global education component for a comprehensive curriculum for college practice. The main goal, in this case, is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions. If the trend continues, study abroad programs may soon be considered a compulsory component of a college education.

Due to the vast number of students who attend community colleges, it is important to encourage students to attend education abroad programs to ensure competitiveness in a global context (Harder, 2011; Parker, 2015). However, Harder (2011) found that community college students are not significantly well-represented in student abroad programs compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. This may be due to the lack of institutional support and opportunities (Harder, 2011). The results are further reflected in a study by Parker (2015), in which it was found that financial aid and scholarships are the primary means to address the lack of access to study abroad programs in community colleges. Other factors such as cost, family support, and vocational challenges can also impact the decision of a community college student to participate in student abroad programs (Amani & Minsun Kim,

2018). Although minimal, research on the sustainable study abroad in the community college levels highlights its benefits on the students. Little is known, however, about other factors that could contribute to its success in such setting.

In rural community colleges, strategies to make study abroad programs successful in spite of financial constraints have included devising more cost-efficient operations (Thomas, 2019). One means by which increased cost efficiency is being achieved is through shifting away from third-party providers to shorter, faculty-led programs. Some rural community colleges have also been successful in establishing partnerships with other rural community colleges to share study abroad resources and thereby begin to benefit from the economies of scale that aid larger institutions in implementing study abroad.

Benefits of Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad programs serve the interests of students and also benefit the community colleges that run them. To a large extent, the success of most awareness efforts to sensitize community college students on the importance of taking part in the study abroad programs has largely been due to the various benefits the community stands to gain. According to Levin (2002), the community becomes easily convinced to encourage enrollment into study abroad programs if they have tangible benefits to refer to. Hence, under this section, the three main benefits of study abroad programs to community colleges will be discussed. The two major benefits include retention through high impact practice and study abroad programs as part of the global education component for a comprehensive curriculum for college practice.

Study abroad programs have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds, encouraging assessment of student involvement in active-learning practices and hence making significant contributions to students' cumulative learning. The initial core curriculum for study abroad programs have evolved into a variety of modern

forms, such as a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and mandatory participation in a learning community (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). These programs often combine broad themes that touch on technology and society and global interdependence. The key goals for learning communities are to encourage the integration of learning across the curriculum and to engross students with “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link “liberal arts” and “professional courses”; others feature service learning (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Hence, study abroad programs create engagement which in return leads to retention and student success (Kuh, 2008). In rural community colleges, study abroad programs have been tied to other institutional initiatives to enhance the profiles of the colleges and to benefit students and the community (Thomas, 2019). Study abroad at a rural community college may represent a unique opportunity for rural students to participate in international study, and some rural community colleges have taken advantage of this condition by tying study abroad programs closely to institutional recruitment initiatives. Additionally, study abroad may be tied to key community needs, such that rural communities benefit from their students’ participation.

Benefits to Community College Students

Study abroad participation gives students the opportunity to discover new locations as well as be immersed in a new culture (Opper, Teichler, & Carlsoh, 1990). This holistic approach to student development adds a whole new level to their overall academic experience. Raby (2007) argued that international programs that include various perspectives improve students’ problem solving and listening skills and encourage them to be a part of the political process and become more engaged citizens. Also, study abroad programs at

community colleges allow community members to take part in group travel and expose them to new experiences they may not have pursued by themselves. In turn, the community members may not only gain a greater appreciation for other cultures but also for their local two-year institution (Stinson & Richardson, 2006).

According to Raby, Rhodes, and Biscarra (2014), community college students who study abroad experience poverty, language barriers, and other situations firsthand, thereby learning to empathize with cultural differences. Participants in study abroad programs also may become more adaptable and improve their international skills (Ferrari & Fine, 2016). The next section discusses the various ways community college study abroad programs can be beneficial.

Cross-Cultural Awareness Benefits Community College Students

The first benefit of study abroad is its positive effect on cross-cultural awareness. The ability to work effectively in a multicultural environment is a skill necessary for success in today's market (Smith, 2011). It is important to develop a sense of connection to those beyond one's group. Study abroad programs help expand students' worldviews. It is clear that a study abroad semester shapes students into more globally minded individuals than those that did not study abroad (Clarke et al., 2009). Noteworthy differences were found for cultural pluralism, efficacy, and interconnectedness, suggesting a high appreciation for and a forward-thinking discovery of their connection with different people and countries (Clarke et al., 2009). Also, study abroad programs allow immigrant students, who are more likely to study at community colleges, the opportunity to travel and potentially learn more about their culture (Zhang, 2011).

Student Engagement of Community College Students and Academic Success

The second benefit of study abroad is its positive effect on success and engagement. Theories of academic engagement propose that when planned academic (in class) and extra-

curricular (out-of-class) activities interconnect they promote student motivation (Chickering & Kuh, 2005). Academically engaged students tend to be more involved in their studies, stay in school, and have a better chance of finishing (Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2013). Tinto (2010), states that colleges that establish programs that increase student engagement will improve the odds of student success. Study abroad is considered a high-impact activity that can have a positive impact on student engagement (Kuh, 2008).

The California Community College Students Outcomes Abroad Research Project documents the effects of study abroad on various student success measures (Center for Global Education, 2015). Numerous studies show that when individual success components get incorporated into the community college environment, these components can lead to increased learning (educational outcomes), persistence (term completion), and higher graduation rates (Raby, et al., 2013).

Study Abroad Improves Retention and Completion for CC Students.

The third benefit of study abroad is its positive effect on retention and completion. Many valuable retention and attainment outcomes occur as a result of studying abroad. Study abroad programs are beneficial due to the engagement-enhancing components such as shared common experiences, mentorship, bonding with faculty, and increased student interaction in joint activities (Raby et al., 2014). Study abroad programs incorporate service learning and experiential education. Recent research has indicated that study abroad participation is among one of the activities that contribute to student persistence (Young, 2008). This may be particularly critical for rural community colleges, where the majority of students may encounter obstacles to persistence as a result of their inadequate preparation for college-level work (Cejda, 2010).

Community colleges often receive a disproportionate number of underprepared students due to open enrollment policies (Smith, 2011). Some studies have shown that study

abroad programs may be particularly valuable to races, ethnicities, and low-income groups (Raby, 2007). Raby (2007) noted that these studies in study abroad programs lead to improved academic performance, interpersonal skills, and better self-confidence. Currently, there is not enough research available that directly measures retention to study abroad participation. However, we do know that the engagement involved in study abroad has an overall positive effect on the possibility of completion (Raby et al., 2013).

Community College Student Personal and Professional Growth

Lastly, students experience an improvement in self-confidence and self-efficacy as one of the benefits of studying abroad (Younes & Asay, 2003). There is a need to separate students from the familiar and encourage them to make discoveries that connect them to a new way of viewing the world, “growth requires both separation and connection” (Daloz, 1986, p. 42). Students will often describe their study abroad experience as “life-changing” (Younes & Asay, 2003, p. 98). Study abroad empowers students to gain an increased understanding of their cultural values and biases. What is taught incidentally through experiences during a study abroad experience could never be replicated in a classroom with a textbook. Additionally, the benefits of these experiences are multiplied when faculty and students share their new awareness, knowledge, and perspectives with their classes upon returning to the community college classroom (Stinson & Richardson, 2009).

Students on study abroad excursions have the opportunity to network and make new friends, both from other countries and the United States. Some students take this opportunity to learn another language. An excellent and practical way to learn a new language is by being a part of the culture. These newly acquired skills strengthen their resume and employment credentials. In our increasingly globalized society, globally minded employees are in high demand. Many employers are looking for individuals with multilingual and multicultural skills and experience.

Barriers to Community College Study Abroad Programs

The major barriers to study abroad are both institutional (not supported by the college's mission, policies, strategies) and individual (faculty and students do not have the knowledge or interest needed to implement and participate in study abroad programs (Green, 2007). The unique mission of the community college, which emphasizes local commitment to community, open access, and workforce development, not only support study abroad programs but also bring about distinct challenges. These challenges may thwart the growth of study abroad opportunities for community college students (Frost & Raby, 2009; Raby, 2008; Robertson, 2015).

Lack of Institutional Support

The mission and vision of the community college are often linked directly to the geographic region the college serves. It is not surprising that with a community first atmosphere many community colleges still view study abroad as a peripheral program, or an amenity, which provides limited benefit to their students (Manns, 2014). Stakeholders, administrators, and board members may not view study abroad programs as being valuable in preparing their students for transfer to universities or helping their students enter the workforce (Green, 2007; Raby, 2016).

Raby (2007) believed that one of the most influential determinates of the success of a study abroad program is having institutional support. Ten years ago, many community colleges added the terms "global education" or "international education" to their college mission statements. However, more recently, as colleges re-write their policies, "global economy" as a visible but direct reference to internationalization or global education was removed (CCIE, 2010). The IIE, the AACC, and the CCIE collaboratively conducted the Education Abroad at the Community College snapshot survey. Their findings indicate that less than 9% of the respondents reported that education abroad was specifically included in

their college mission statement (Raby, 2008). Interestingly, 52% of the same respondents indicated that support from the administration was a “critical necessity” for the continued existence and success of their study abroad programs (Raby, 2008, p. 20).

Absence of Funding

Organizing and facilitating study abroad trips are both time consuming and costly. Proper funding is crucial to the growth and continued existence of study abroad programs. Funding is one of the most commonly cited challenges to the growth and implementation of study abroad programs at community colleges (Frost & Raby, 2009). Green (2007) explained that as long as study abroad programs are marginalized on most community college campuses, funding for these programs will not be a high priority. Lack of funding has had a significant impact on the growth and creation of these programs. Data from the Education Abroad at the Community College survey indicated that additional funding would be essential in supporting existing programs and creating new ones (Raby, 2008). Many study-abroad programs struggle with limited to non-existent budgets, downsizing of areas that support global education, and students increasingly not being able to afford the trips. The combination of these factors often leads to the demise of these programs (Raby, 2007; Raby & Valeau 2007). Interestingly, Raby and Rhodes (2004) found that financial issues at the institutional level had a stronger impact on students’ decisions to study abroad than did other primary factors such as work and family obligation or self-funding issues.

Federal and state-level funding allocations based on student counts may disadvantage rural community colleges (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006), and low-income levels in rural communities may prevent these colleges from offsetting federal and state funding inequities by raising tuition rates (Cejda, 2010). Funding dedicated to study abroad programs may be used in one of three ways: (a) as institutional funding, to develop organizational mechanisms to enhance study abroad (e.g. a dedicated study abroad office and/or staff, funds

for college-directed marketing, and funds for professional development for study abroad leaders); (b) as funding for programs costs, including marketing and site visits; and (c) as funding to cover student costs, including fees and tuition. Many community colleges are forced to seek private sources of revenue for their study abroad programs. Frost and Raby (2009) expressed their concern, stating that when study abroad becomes a for-profit venture, only those with the means to participate will benefit from the experience, resulting in the exclusion of low-income students who would significantly benefit from these types of programs. The community college mission of open access will also be jeopardized.

Unmotivated Faculty and Staff

Institutional support and economic resources are essential to the development of strong study abroad programs, but leadership is even more significant. Faculty and staff members that recruit and implement study abroad programs must understand the importance of international education and be enthusiastic and dedicated to the promotion of international education at the community college level (Altbach, 2011). According to Raby (2007), the only way to ensure such enthusiasm and dedication of faculty staff is through motivation. Motivation in the context of faculty staff refers to all measures taken to increase job satisfaction and hence improve performance. Like any other employee in any given organization, sufficient resources should be allocated to staff remuneration. Given their close interaction with the program, faculty staff should be closely involved in the development and implementation of policies meant to enhance the study abroad program. Involvement creates a sense of appreciation and hence psychological motivation. Instances, where the faculty staff is least involved in such matters, makes them feel sidelined and hence demotivated.

Rural community colleges may face particularly low levels of faculty motivation (Cejda, 2010). Lack of faculty motivation at rural community colleges is associated primarily with low funding for faculty pay. Low levels of faculty motivation, at these

institutions, is also associated with working conditions that qualified faculty may find demoralizing. An example of such demoralizing conditions are low student motivation and low levels of student preparation, based upon what a faculty member would expect for college-level work.

Open Access

Community colleges are best known for their open-access admissions policies. As a result, students who attend community colleges are on the average older and more diverse than students from four-year institutions. Community college students have work obligations, family responsibilities, and limited financial resources that restrict their access to study-abroad programs. These aspects may hamper the potential for community colleges to create and maintain study abroad initiatives. Community colleges have to develop study abroad programs that are best matched for the lifestyle of the community college student (Raby, 2008). Begin-Caouette et al. (2015) added that the most successful study abroad programs are those designed with student needs in mind, as well as the needs of non-traditional students.

Previous researchers have suggested that rural community college students are less likely than their urban counterparts to take advantage of study abroad opportunities, even when these opportunities are accessible (Thomas, 2019). Rural students' reluctance to participate in study abroad programs may be associated with financial constraints that are more severe in impoverished rural communities, and with a lack of prior intercultural exposure. Embedding study abroad programs into the curriculum may be one way to encourage rural students to take advantage of study abroad programs when they exist.

Student Apprehensions

Institutional constraints are part of the problem, with money and time being two of the major hurdles that students wishing to study abroad must overcome. Many rural community

colleges serve lower-income students (Cejda, 2010). Government support is often limited to tuition alone, leaving subsequent financial costs to be met by the student (Opper et al., 1990). As a result, despite their desires, some students cannot afford to take part in the study abroad programs.

Time is another factor that limits students' participation in the study abroad program. The design of the program is that students are expected to learn a lot within a very short time. For instance, typical study abroad programs at community colleges usually last between four to six weeks, with students expected to learn about international relations and the culture of the host country, as well as attending to core academic responsibilities (Opper et al., 1990). The fact that so much work is squeezed into such a short time scares most potential students, often limiting their participation in the program.

Finally, due to the influence of the local community, some students do not find it necessary to study abroad. For instance, some students do not envisage themselves in professional engagements that might require knowledge gained from study abroad programs. Altbach (2011), notes that such naivety does not only limit one's opportunities but, might develop into a major disadvantage especially where institutions evolve to embrace globalization

Barriers in Rural Community Colleges

Rural community colleges are often inadequately funded by federal and state governments, which allocate educational money according to the number of students enrolled, rather than according to the actual needs of institutions (Cejda, 2010; Thomas 2019; Pennington et al., 2006). Rural community colleges typically serve small but widely dispersed populations, and are therefore unable to take advantage of economies of scale, making their per-student funding needs greater than those of larger or urban institutions.

Additionally, low income levels in many rural areas prevent rural community colleges from compensating for funding shortfalls through tuition increases.

When an underfunded institution is unable to subsidize study abroad programs, costs must be shifted to students. This can make the cost of study abroad prohibitive for rural community college students, many of whom are from low-income families (Cejda, 2010; Thomas, 2019). Inadequate funding also makes the challenge of attracting qualified, motivated faculty particularly acute for rural institutions (Cejda, 2010). Faculty members who are unmotivated because of low pay may find themselves also discouraged by other factors that disproportionately affect rural community colleges, particularly in the context of study abroad. Rural students may be less motivated than their urban peers, and may exhibit lower levels of college readiness than students at larger or urban institutions. Faculty at rural community colleges may find these conditions demoralizing, particularly in the context of study abroad, where students' lack of motivation and of prior intercultural exposure may make comparatively expensive educational opportunities seem unattractive to students.

Future Direction

As the study abroad field grows and matures, it will be important to do more research to help demonstrate the value and importance that international study brings to community colleges. Most of the research to date is from four-year institutions; researchers know little about community college students who study abroad and even less about rural community colleges that study abroad. Diversity is another key component missing from the literature. Future research should aim to incorporate more diverse samples, specifically individuals that are different ages, socio-economic statuses, and races. The majority of the study abroad participants are white, middle-class, and female. It would be nice to examine the benefits a study abroad experience has on populations that are more analogous to the populations of most community colleges.

There is a range of positive outcomes that occur as a result of having the opportunity to study abroad. The needs of a globalized world are expanding, and it is time for community colleges to embrace the future. Study abroad not only builds cultural awareness, but it also serves to enrich social capital and provides the skills needed to live in a global economy (Raby et al., 2014). More research is needed to address the benefits study abroad provides to community colleges.

Previous research undertakings have also been community-centered and have done little to address individual attitude and willingness to take part in the study abroad programs (Green, 2007). While previous studies have outlined the benefits of the program to the community, little effort has been made, especially in colleges, to encourage enrollment. Despite the government subsidies towards the program, very few students still see the need to take part in such programs. Colleges alone cannot effectively offer the required awareness to help increase the enrollment. Hence, future research should address strategies that can be used to convince more students to participate in study abroad programs.

Financial constraints, as well as other challenges, still face students who take part in the study abroad programs (Raby et al., 2014). For instance, life in a new country involves re-adjusting to fit into the host culture and way of life. Although some students find it easy, others complete their studies without learning anything about the host culture. Future research should, therefore, be designed to address the challenges faced by students taking part in the study abroad programs as well as probable solutions that can be deployed to help such students.

Conclusion

Community colleges have a significant role to play in advancing study abroad programs for their students. The AACC (2015) fact sheet shows that 41% of first-year students are enrolling in community colleges, while 46% of all U.S. undergraduates enroll in

community colleges. Although community college students make up a significant percentage of the nation's undergraduates, they represent approximately 2% of the study abroad population (IHE, 2015). Global learning at the post-secondary level should start with community colleges. Many students' education will stop with the community college experience, and this may be the only formal academic opportunity for those individuals to learn about other countries, world trends, and cultures (Green, 2007). Community colleges need to be intentional and strategic in promoting an understanding of other cultures.

Students who participate in education abroad programs experience a substantial development in interpersonal skills, academic performance, cultural adeptness, and personal growth (Raby, 2008). The value of both the intentional and incidental learning surpasses any professor's vision of changing the viewpoint of students. The academic advantages, the active group development, and the personal resources that students get on these trips lead to life-altering experiences, and endearing memories students can hold onto forever. Hence, studying abroad not only enhances the lives of students and faculty that travel, but also the institution as well as the community as a whole.

In conclusion, future research, especially additional empirical research on study abroad programs at community colleges and even more specifically at rural community colleges is necessary. It is evident that there are fundamental aspects of the program that have been partially attended to or are yet to be brought into the limelight for consideration. In the same regard, community colleges should take up the awareness mantle and actively contribute to the development of study abroad programs at community colleges.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher describes the research design, methodology, and procedures for this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to better understand and describe the development of successful short-term study abroad experiences at rural community colleges. The study included a qualitative survey; interviews of leaders of community college short-term study abroad programs, and document analysis, with the aim of identifying sustainable means for short-term study abroad programs at rural community colleges.

Research Foci

In this study, the researcher focused on a single, overarching question: How can rural community colleges develop successful and sustainable study abroad experiences? Three sub questions sharpen the focus as follows:

1. What skills and characteristics are required in a study abroad leader at a rural community college?
2. What senior administrative support is required for a successful and sustainable study abroad program, at a rural community college?
3. What are the barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad experiences at rural community colleges? How have successful programs overcome these barriers?

Guiding Research Perspective

Qualitative research involves an exhaustive understanding of an event, phenomenon, and/or human behavior in its distinctive natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Hayes & Singh,

2012; Lichtman, 2006). Since the decision to participate in and lead study abroad programs is a complicated occurrence and necessitates a thorough understanding of human behavior, and the meanings leaders and participants attribute to their experiences, a qualitative inquiry was considered the most plausible approach in the collection of rich data for this study. The justification for choosing a qualitative design is discussed in the following section.

There are several reasons why a qualitative method was deemed most appropriate for this study. First, a qualitative approach provided the ability to explore community college study abroad leader's viewpoints and decisions related to study abroad participation. Second, communication with participants confirmed the respondent's accurateness of interpretation, and allow them to expand on unfamiliar or unexpected answers (Grbich, 2013). Third, qualitative inquiry "involves remaining flexible within the environment, attending to cultural considerations, understanding another's perspective, building trust and rapport, and relying on techniques that elicit participant meanings and understandings" (Hayes & Singh, 2012, p. 4). Fourth, qualitative research focuses on an individual's understanding and viewpoint of their experiences in their natural settings. This approach seemed most closely associated with the social constructionism paradigm of this study, which explains how people acquire knowledge and make sense of the world (Lichtman, 2006). Also, since there is a lack of current theory and literature regarding community college study abroad participation, it was hoped that a qualitative design would generate thick data via themes, categories, and concepts that would be useful in explaining how group leaders encourage participation in study abroad programs at community colleges

Research Design

For this study, the researcher employed a qualitative design of the three C's coding to address the research foci. Lichtman's (2006) process of the three C's: coding, categorizing, and concepts will be used to analyze the data. Topics, patterns, and themes were identified

using comparative pattern analysis, allowing a greater understanding of similarities and differences. An initial reading of all the transcripts of the interviews and focus group was completed, with the raw data being reviewed at least twice and from these initial readings, themes will be developed.

Participants

The population of this study included rural community college faculty that have led or planned to lead short-term study abroad programs from various rural community colleges across the United States. The participants were grouped into two broad categories. The initial group consisted of facilitators who include all members of different faculties and program administrators who are involved in the planning and execution of study abroad programs in rural community colleges. This group of participants will give feedback mainly on administrative challenges and the level of awareness on such programs in the various colleges.

The second group consisted of faculty who have either led or plan to lead short-term study programs from various rural community colleges across the United States. This group was counted upon to offer insightful responses on the general experience of taking part in the programs as well as other challenges that might be surrounding the program. Under this category, the researcher interviewed and collected responses from a minimum of 10 faculty members who were identified while attending a study abroad conference.

The researcher identified respondents with sufficient knowledge and information on the impact of study abroad programs on rural community colleges at the conference if they are willing to participate in the study. Thereafter, the researcher used the identified participants to recruit other similar knowledgeable personnel to form part of the research population for the intended research study.

Instrumentation

Unlike quantitative research, which tears apart phenomena to examine its component parts, the qualitative research examines how all the related parts work together to form something complete (Merriam, 1998). This research was conducted in three different formats: a focus group, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Primary data was collected through personal interviews and a focus group. Secondary data was collected through the public domain including institutional websites and annual reports.

Table 1, below, is a data collection matrix that presents the evaluation blueprint used to design the questionnaire instrument for the semi-structured interviews, focus group and data collection. The matrix provides a guide to ensure that data is collected to address each of the research foci in the study.

Table 1.
Data Collection Matrix

Research foci		Focus group	Interviews	Document analysis
RQ: 1	Sustainability	2,4,5	2,4,5	
RQ: 1a	Skill and characteristics of a study-abroad leader	1,4,5	1,4,5	
RQ: 1b	Institutional support	6,7,8	6,7	DA
RQ: 1c	Barriers	5	5	DA

Semi-structured interviews: A face to face interview approach was used to explore and examine participant's perspectives and experiences regarding the phenomena under investigation. Group leaders were asked to participate in the semi-structured interviews in person and via telephone. The semi-structured interview type provided consistency for the basic interview process and questioning while allowing flexibility to fully gather the

interviewees' experiences (Hayes & Singh, 2012). This is because the interviews made use of questions that directed the respondent, regarding the nature of the expected response, while offering limited freedom for deviation, without missing the key demands of the leading question. Nine questions were asked during the interviews (see Appendix A and B for protocol for focus groups and Appendix C for the protocol for personal interviews). Follow-up questions, customized to the responses received for the initial questions, were asked in order to probe for deeper and more rich data from the individual interviews.

Focus groups: Group leaders were asked to participate in a focus group while attending a conference in Iceland geared toward creating and developing future study abroad programs at community colleges. This was a pilot program to establish the efficacy of study abroad programs. The interview questions were modified from the pilot study (see Appendix A for the pilot study protocol). A second focus group was conducted in Costa Rica with a different group of study abroad leaders. Nine initial questions were asked during the focus group (see Appendix B for the protocol). Follow-up questions, customized to the responses received for the initial questions, were asked in order to probe for deeper and more rich data from the focus group participants.

Document Analysis

Printed and electronic material related to the community college's study abroad opportunities: websites, literature, policy statements and even curricular documents were studied and analyzed. The essence of the analysis was to establish the credibility of data collected from the focus group: For instance, there were possibilities that the focus group would give false or biased feedback. There were also possibilities that institutions participating in study abroad programs might exaggerate on their respective websites in order to create an unrealistic impression. The researcher ensured that the study was carried out in accordance with the chosen methodology. Research study reports are often used as resource

materials for subsequent and future studies. Hence, adherence to the methodology provisions is paramount if the research findings of this study are to be considered as part of future studies on the same topic.

The researcher developed the data collection plan and procedures followed in the study. Due to the nature of data required and the participants included in the research study, the process of data collection was spelled out to ensure that no item was left out. Planning aided in designing the procedure and modalities for carrying out the data collection process.

The researcher examined the websites of colleges attended by the participants to determine whether information on study abroad opportunities could be easily found on the site and to determine whether globalization or internationalization was mentioned in the vision or mission statements. Through this activity, the researcher was able to evaluate the presentation and availability of information on study abroad programs and to evaluate the incorporation of such information in the visions and mission statements of various organizations.

Researcher Positionality

As a study-abroad faculty coordinator of more than seven short-term study abroad trips at a community college, the researcher was aware of the challenges facing faculty leaders as they plan these excursions. The researcher understood that it is sometimes necessary to go beyond the official mandate in order to ensure that some students eventually take part in the programs. As a result of prior experience in study abroad programs, the researcher understood some of the requirements placed on students and on coordinators in regard to planning and coordinating study abroad programs. Such knowledge and insight was valuable when analyzing the dynamics of study abroad programs and the strategies for winning the support of the community.

The extent to which individuals take up certain duties often depends on their knowledge of the subject matter at hand, with confidence levels often increasing as knowledge increases. The study abroad program is not a theoretical concept for the researcher, who has regularly been part of such opportunities and fully understands what they entail. The researcher, therefore, kept a reflexive journal throughout the data collection and data analysis process as part of the effort to keep any potential research bias in check. Analytic skills are essential for research undertakings that use qualitative approaches, with researchers required to carefully consider the various variables and the data obtained to develop formidable findings. In this case, prior experience with the specific subject of inquiry put the researcher in a position well suited for foreseeing some of the probable challenges and for tackling them before they could impact the research.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness and credibility determine the quality and veracity of data obtained and inferences made. The researcher, therefore, expected that all the respondents would be sincere and credible while submitting their responses, thus enabling the researcher to process consistent and factual information from the data obtained. In the same regard, all the findings and recommendations were made on the basis of the data collected, not on the basis of any biased notions, perceptions, views or opinions held by the researcher.

The terms reliability and validity are traditionally associated with quantitative research, with these concepts being seen as increasingly important concepts in qualitative research as well. In quantitative research, consideration is given to gathering evidence of human behavior to verify and elaborate on a theory that allows researchers to state causes and make predictions; while in qualitative research, the goal is to better comprehend human behavior and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Creswell (2013) defined qualitative validity as the measures taken by the researchers to check the accuracy and reliability of the

findings. It is recommended that several strategies are employed to ensure qualitative reliability and validity. For this study, the researcher used pilot testing, the interview protocol, triangulation of data sources (interviews, a focus group, and data analysis), and the presentation of participant descriptions in rich detail, expounding researcher bias, reflexivity and peer examination.

To enhance trustworthiness and credibility, the researcher employed the following approaches:

- The interview protocol was pilot tested with a focus group of community college study abroad professionals, while attending a regional study abroad conference in Iceland (see appendices A). The purpose of this pilot study was to identify any flaws in the measuring instrument – in this case, a questionnaire. The researcher determined through the pilot study that the instruments questions required modification in order to elicit adequate data. Based on this pilot study the questions were revised (see Appendix B).
- The researcher employed triangulation, which is a proven method for enhancing trustworthiness and credibility. This research method involved making use of multiple and various sources of information, methods and theories to provide deeper understanding of data (Merriam, 1998). Through semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and electronic document analysis, the researcher obtained varied and detailed data that facilitated a comprehensive and revealing depiction of what was occurring (Maxwell, 2008).
- Reflexivity is a key component of the research process, recommending the use of a research journal to document the researcher's assumptions and observations during the research process. According to Gabriel (2018), reflexivity is "the ability to take a step back to question their own assumptions, the interest served

by their research, the ramifications of their findings and the ethical foundations of their practice” (pg. 138). For this study, the researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the research by keeping a journal detailing the research process, the study assumptions, potential research biases, and researcher positionality.

- Peer examination involves collecting feedback from peers or other qualitative methods experts in the field of academic research to ensure proper scrutiny of this research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Throughout the development of this study, the researcher shared portions of the study with colleagues and other experts in the field of qualitative research. They were asked to focus on the qualitative data analysis and coding methodology. These individuals were selected based on their academic and qualitative expertise.

Limitations

Several limitations had an impact on this study. First, the study is limited in its suitability for qualitative generalization. Because this study did not take a random sample of all rural community colleges in the nation that have short-term study abroad programs, study findings may not be transferable to all community colleges. Depending on size and location, some community colleges have more resources than other community colleges that were included (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research makes it difficult to investigate causality among different variables or to explore differences in the quality and quantity of information obtained from different respondents and hence increases chances of arriving at non-consistent conclusions (Creswell, 2013). Based on the different degrees of awareness about the study abroad programs, some respondents may give false responses, exaggerate feedback or hold back information that could have led to vital inferences. The fact that the research is open-ended implies that participants have more control over the content of the data collected. In this

case, the researcher was not able to verify the results objectively against the scenarios stated by the respondents.

Lastly, qualitative research is labor intensive, requiring an extensive analysis process that includes categorization, coding and evaluation of data. All three processes require a significant amount of time to be exhaustively executed (Creswell, 2013). In the same regard, qualitative research also requires extensive experience in research so as to obtain the targeted data from the group of respondents. In most cases, different conclusions are derived, based on the same information and depending on the personal characteristics of the researcher. Qualitative research, therefore, calls for extensive consultation to come up with consistent findings and hence recommendations.

Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the methodological choices for this study. Qualitative research was selected as the most appropriate design for understanding the dynamics that exist in implementing a community college study abroad program. Approaching this research through a social constructionist paradigm allowed the researcher to examine the ways that individuals attach meanings to their experiences and construct their realities. This view not only served as the best means of discovering group leaders' constructed realities, but also mirrored the researcher's personal view of the world.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and describe the development of successful short-term study abroad experiences at rural community colleges. A rural community college was defined as a two-year, publicly controlled institution located in a wide geographical area, serving a community population of 100,000 citizens or fewer, and with a comprehensive educational program (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007; Vineyard, 1979). One primary research question and three sub-questions were used to indicate the research foci for the study:

How can rural community colleges develop successful and sustainable study abroad experiences?

1. What skills and characteristics are required in a study abroad leader at a rural community college?
2. What senior administrative support is required for a successful and sustainable study abroad program at a rural community college?
3. What are the barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad experiences at rural community colleges and how have successful programs overcome these barriers?

Chapter 4 includes a presentation of the findings of the data collection and data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3. The presentation of findings is organized by research sub-question, and within research sub-question by theme. Included in the presentation is a demographic profile of the research sample. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Findings

- The researcher conducted a pilot study to assess the suitability of the interview protocol for gathering data to address the research foci. Data for the pilot study were collected from a focus group consisting of nine participants from three colleges. The researcher determined through the pilot study that while the interview protocol was understandable, the questions required modification in order to elicit adequate data. Therefore, the questions were revised (see Appendix B).

Data from the pilot study were not reported with the findings of the study. Pilot study participants were drawn from larger campuses, rather than from the rural community colleges that later became the focus of the study.

Data for the study were collected from 11 semi-structured interviews with a total of 13 participants (two of the interviews were conducted with two participants). Through experience as a leader of study abroad programs, the researcher met and interacted with a number of leaders of study abroad programs. Through snowball sampling, the researcher selected participants who would be able to provide rich data to address the research foci. When asking potential participants to provide data for the study, the researcher informed them of the study's focus on study-abroad programs at rural community colleges. The researcher intentionally refrained from giving other background information in order to prevent the creation of bias in participants' thinking, prior to conducting interviews.

All participants were study abroad leaders at their rural community colleges. Of the 13 participants, two (interviewed together) were from two rural community colleges in Minnesota; two (interviewed together) were from a rural community college in Pennsylvania; two (interviewed separately) were from two rural community colleges in North Carolina; two (interviewed separately) were from two rural community colleges in Virginia. In addition,

the participants included one representative from rural community colleges in each of the following five states: New York, Maryland, New Mexico, Florida, and West Virginia.

Participants held job titles including:

- professor (nine participants, who taught subjects including English, biology, sociology, natural resources, modern languages, and history);
- department chair (two participants, in social sciences at different community colleges);
- director of education abroad (one participant);
- coordinator of study abroad (one participant);
- international coordinator (one participant); and
- assistant director of international students (one participant).

Eight participants were female, and five participants were male. Table 2 indicates the number of participants from the states that were included, and Table 3 indicates participants' job titles. Table 4 indicates the U.S. regions in which the participants worked, and also indicates the pseudonyms by which participants are identified in the following presentation of findings.

Table 2.
Individual Interview Participants' Rural Community College Locations

State	<i>N</i> of participants from that state
Minnesota	2 from two community colleges; interviewed together
North Carolina	2 from two community colleges, interviewed separately
Pennsylvania	2 from one community colleges, interviewed together
Virginia	2 from two community colleges, interviewed separately
Florida	1
Maryland	1
New Mexico	1
New York	1
West Virginia	1
Total:	13

Table 3.
Individual Interview Participants' Job Titles

Job title	<i>N</i> of participants with job title
Chair of Social Sciences	2
Professor of English	2
Asst. Dir. of International Students	1
Coordinator of Study Abroad	1
Dir. of Education Abroad	1
International Coordinator	1
Professor	1
Professor of Biology	1
Professor of Modern Languages	1
Professor of Natural Resources	1
Professor of Sociology	1
Total:	13

Table 4.
Participant Pseudonyms and U.S. Regions of Current Employment

Participant Pseudonym	U.S. region of current employment	Interview type
Ann	Midwest	Individual
Bernard	Midwest	Individual
Charles	Midwest	Individual
David	East coast	Individual
Ellen	East coast	Individual
Frida	East coast	Individual
Gretchen	East coast	Individual
Helen	East coast	Individual
Ian	East coast	Individual
Jane	East coast	Individual
Kyle	Northeast	Individual
Lynn	Northeast	Individual
Megan	Southwest	Individual

Note. All focus group participants were employed in the Midwest Region of the United States.

Data were also collected from a focus group conducted at a conference in Costa Rica and attended by the researcher. The focus group included eight study abroad leaders, five of whom were from a rural community college in Illinois, two of whom were from a rural community college in Wisconsin, and one of whom was from a different rural community

college in Illinois. Individual and focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, yielding approximately 100 pages of single-spaced transcripts. Transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11 software for analysis and coded thematically by the researcher.

Electronic data sources were obtained for 11 out of 11 of the rural community colleges represented in the individual interviews. Electronic data sources included: mission and vision statements and statements of institutional values and goals (to indicate the degree to which rural community college administration had incorporated globalization and/or study abroad into institutional values); informational documents for students, parents, staff, and faculty about study abroad (to indicate the amount, quality, and availability of the information); and informational documents for students indicating how to pay for study abroad (to indicate available funding sources).

The following presentation of findings is organized by research foci. Findings associated with research focus (a) indicated the skills and characteristics that are required in a study abroad leader at a rural community college. In relation to research focus (b), findings indicated the senior administrative support that is required for a successful and sustainable study abroad program at a rural community college. Findings related to research focus (c) indicated the barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad experiences at rural community colleges and how successful programs have overcome these barriers. A summary of the findings related to these three research foci will be used to address the primary research focus, by indicating how rural community colleges can develop successful and sustainable study abroad experiences.

The researcher analyzed the data using the six-step procedure for thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first step of thematic analysis, the researcher uploaded the interview transcriptions into NVivo 11 software and conducted an in-depth

review of the data to become familiar with its content. The second step consisted of the generation of initial codes, which were labeled with key descriptive words or phrases. In conducting this step, the researcher created nodes in NVivo 11 software and grouped units of data that expressed similar ideas or meanings into those nodes. The third step involved searching for themes. In this step, the researcher grouped similar codes into potential themes. In NVivo, this process involved the creation of parent nodes, which were labeled with descriptive words or phrases. Similar nodes created during the second step of the analysis were grouped under the parent nodes as child nodes. The fourth step of the analysis consisted of reviewing the themes. In this phase, the researcher refined the themes developed in the previous phase. The fifth phase consisted of defining and naming the themes. In this phase, the researcher further refined while defining the themes. Lastly, the sixth phase consisted of producing the presentation of results which is presented in the following tables.

Skills and characteristics of a study abroad leader at a rural community college.

Data used to address this research focus was drawn from individual and focus group interviews. Two themes emerged during data analysis to address the research focus.

Theme 1: Study abroad leaders should be motivated and organized. Five out of eight focus group participants and eight out of 13 individual interview participants indicated that study abroad leaders needed to be highly motivated individuals who had the skill and initiative to envision, organize, and conduct a study abroad experience almost singlehandedly. None of the remaining three focus group participants or five individual interview participants disagreed with this perception. Other terms used to describe leaders with the needed traits of drive and organizational ability included “detail-oriented,” “self-sufficient,” “passionate,” “somebody who can follow through,” “the person who really wants to make that trip happen,” “has the vision,” “has taken ownership,” and “people with positive attitudes.” Ian made a representative comment in saying, “the program leader is the single

most important deciding factor of the success in that program,” and added that the most important characteristics of a successful program leader were, “Their energy, their drive.”

All participants in the individual interviews and focus groups indicated that at their institutions either all study abroad programs, or the most successful study abroad programs, were envisioned and initiated by the prospective program leaders. Kyle described the need for leader initiative in the following terms: “we don't typically go out and say, ‘Is anyone interested?’ It's more people [faculty] coming to us and saying, ‘Hey, I have this idea for a course.’” Lynn said, “the most successful programs have been programs that faculty have envisioned.” A focus group participant stated that a faculty member who had an idea for a study abroad program at her rural community college needed to submit a formal application, develop a budget and a detailed itinerary, and present these materials in the form of a proposal to an International Education Committee. Faculty members who lacked the organizational ability or the initiative and drive to develop a detailed and feasible proposal were typically denied approval, the participant further indicated.

Additionally, data indicated that program leaders needed to recruit a sufficient number of students to meet minimum enrollment, and that motivated leadership was the most effective way to do so: “motivated faculty motivate students” (Ann). Motivating students and other faculty required a leader, “who can follow through, and do the necessary legwork and keep in touch with students,” and who had “a passion for the project on the one hand, but also being...detail-oriented,” according to a focus group participant. Lynn indicated that building the necessary relationships and developing the required proposal were most reliably accomplished by “a faculty member who is organized [and] self-sufficient.”

If the study abroad proposal was approved by the rural community college's leadership and minimum enrollment was met, the study abroad leader needed to continue to be organized and driven to conduct the trip successfully. Participants were emphatic in

stating that a study abroad experience was “not a vacation” for the faculty leader, and that organized and driven leadership was needed when unexpected events required quick adaptations. The leader’s role during the study abroad experience was, “basically a 24/7 job” which required the leader to “play every single role...Everything from just teacher to nurse to mom to police” (Lynn). Focus group participants referred to the necessity for study abroad leaders to have the drive to “Sit up in an emergency room, for example, late into the night,” or to “answer students’ texts, and actually texting [to students, to] say, ‘Where are you?’ and sort of keep that kind of connection with students.” The faculty leader had to maintain this level of commitment and vigilance while remaining organized enough, “Not to get lost on your own” (focus group participant).

Theme 2: Study abroad leaders should be good at building relationships. Seven out of 13 individual interview participants and four out of eight focus group participants indicated that study abroad leaders needed to be good at building relationships with students and other faculty. No participants disagreed with this perception. Participants noted that administrators, and particularly administrators who worked in roles dedicated to international education, could assist faculty members in developing study abroad plans. However, data indicated that even in rural community colleges where this assistance was available to faculty, the prospective program leader needed to “make the professional connections,” have “the idea, the vision,” and “[take] a lot of ownership” (Kyle). Data indicated that to make the needed professional connections with other faculty, a prospective study abroad leader needed to, “talk in faculty meetings, you have to beat the drums that this is something that is going to happen and we're working on it” (Bernard).

Data further indicated that recruiting a sufficient number of students to meet minimum enrollment required leaders to have the ability to build relationships with them. Participants suggested that rural community college students were often reluctant to study

abroad, and that rural community college students may “look at travel like a lunar landing” (Jane). To overcome students’ reluctance to leave familiar environments, prospective study abroad leaders needed to market the program to students aggressively while establishing a personal connection: “they need to have that relationship built with them [students] in order to [get students to] say, ‘I wanna travel with [faculty member] because [faculty member] is my instructor and I trust [faculty member]’” (focus group participant). A focus group participant from a rural community college where a staff of administrators was available to assist faculty with marketing study abroad experiences to students stated, “We have our websites, and the TV monitors, and the table tents, and the emails, but...the faculty member leading the program is hooking the student.” The same focus group participant offered a description of the outgoing personal style a faculty leader needed in order to recruit students to study abroad:

You need to get it [study abroad] in front of them [students] constantly for it to keep pushing them. We know that community college students, they need to be pushed in that direction and pushed out of their comfort zone—so it does take a lot of effort then on the faculty side of it to do that, to have that personality, to kind of be intrusive with the students, almost (focus group participant).

The trait that faculty members needed to build relationships with students was described repeatedly as “charisma,” as when Lynn stated, “you can have a faculty member who’s super-organized and well-travelled, but they also need to have that kind of, I don’t know, charisma, where students are just drawn to them.” Charismatic study abroad leaders who were able to build relationships with students were also described as having “a good pull with students,” and as someone toward whom students “gravitate.” It was important for leaders to be able to “attract” students because “the leader-to-student connection is so important” in recruiting for study abroad (Lynn).

Required Senior Administrative Support for a Study Abroad Program at a Rural Community College

Data used to address this research focus were drawn from individual and focus group interviews. Two themes emerged during data analysis to address the research focus.

Theme 3: Study abroad is not sustainable without administrative encouragement. Seven out of 13 individual interview participants and four out of eight focus group participants indicated that a study abroad program could be successful without funding or other resources from college administrators if faculty leaders were sufficiently dedicated. The minimal level of support that was needed from administrators for faculty to successfully implement a study abroad program was described in the following terms: “Well, if you [faculty] want to plan it, let's see what happens” (Ann); “what we have is absolute approval support, goodwill, and no funding” (Helen); “free rein to do what I need to do” (Charles); “don't throw up a bunch of administrative roadblocks” (Charles); and “Well, we [administrators] basically trust you [faculty] to do the right thing and to dot all your Is and cross all your Ts” (Charles). Thus, a rural community college study abroad program was able to function without funding, a dedicated study abroad office, or administrative assistance with planning and marketing, provided that faculty were sufficiently committed and the administration did not create unnecessary obstacles.

An example of the situation in a community college where the administration was enthusiastic about study abroad but unable to fund it was provided by Ellen:

They've always supported our programs, not financially, but they supported them as courses, and allowed us to take the students along. Some of our faculty members and administrators have actually gone with us on some of our trips as well.

Representative descriptions of administrative attitudes toward study abroad programs in community colleges such as the one just described included: “they've been fantastic”

(Charles); “the administration of the college is letting us run with it” (David); “we have gotten a lot of support...both personal encouragement as well as institutional encouragement” (Brian); “there’s a lot of flexibility” (focus group); “We have a lot of support at an institutional level, so that makes finding resources mostly a technical obstacle” (Kyle); and “We’re very lucky that our president is kind of on fire: he’s made this [study abroad] one of our institutional initiatives” (Jane). Study abroad programs in rural community colleges where the administration freely provided “institutional and personal encouragement,” but not funding or other resources were considered sustainable, and study abroad leaders from these rural community colleges spoke enthusiastically about the level of administrative support they received. Thus, rural community colleges that were unable to fund a study abroad program could still implement one successfully, provided that faculty were sufficiently dedicated and high-level administrators gave encouragement and institutional backing.

Study abroad programs in community colleges where the administration provided neither funding nor institutional or personal encouragement were considered unsustainable or unlikely to be sustained, however. Gretchen offered a representative description of the situation in rural community colleges of this kind:

I did not feel that the administration helped very much. In fact, when I first proposed it, our chief financial officer was totally against it. Had spoken to one of the college lawyers and said, “What? Take community college students abroad? That’s a terrible idea.” I had to go to the academic dean and the president of the college to get permission to do so.

Other representative descriptions of administrative attitudes in rural community colleges where study abroad was permitted but neither supported nor encouraged included: “We had to really work with the administration to make it happen, [and] as soon as it was not working well, then they dropped it like a hot potato” (Ann); “I think it was the president that

actually was questioning whether it was the role of community colleges to have international education” (Bernard); and “I did not feel that the administration helped very much” (Gretchen). Data indicated that administrative support consisting only of permission, but not of institutional and personal encouragement, was unlikely to foster a sustainable study abroad program. A focus group participant stated that for study abroad to be successful, “I think it’s important for them [the executive administrative team] to see the value and really believe in the value of study abroad and creating a global student.”

Triangulation of electronic data sources. Statements of institutional mission, vision, values, and/or goals were obtained for the 11 rural community colleges represented by the individual interviewees. These statements indicated whether and how globalization and/or study abroad had been incorporated into articulated institutional values, and thus provided an objective indication of the level of support among college leadership for globalization, internationalization, and study abroad. The researcher also attempted to access information about study abroad on institutional websites to determine the availability and prominence of that information, as an additional indication of rural community college leaders’ support for study abroad.

Of the 11 rural community colleges for which statements of institutional mission, values, and/or goals were obtained, five referred to globalization or preparation to work and study in a global society as an institutional value. The remaining six community colleges included no reference to globalization or internationalization in any statement of institutional values. Of the five community colleges that had published language supportive of globalization, one community college’s mission statement included the following statement: “maintains an educational environment that broadens perspectives, promotes global awareness, and leads to responsible citizenship.” A different community college had published the following language as part of its mission statement: “to prepare students from

diverse communities to excel in further education and employment in a global society.” A third community college included the following language in its mission statement: “to prepare a diverse population for creative and responsible participation in a global society.” A fourth community college had included the following language in its statement of core values: “We Value Diversity and Globalization in education to prepare learners to be effective in a global society.” No statement of institutional values specifically mentioned study abroad.

Of the six community colleges that did not include language about internationalization or globalization in their statements of institutional values, two linked to information about study abroad from their homepages, but the information was not current; for two community colleges, information about study abroad could only be found online through a general search, and the information was not current; one community college had no information about study abroad online; and only one community college had a link from its homepage to information about study abroad, with the information being current. Of the five community colleges that included language about globalization in statements of institutional values, two had information about study abroad online that could only be found with a general search and was not current; two had no online information about study abroad; and one had information about study abroad and about an institutional partnership with a university to promote globalization, but the information was not current. Thus, findings from archival documents indicated strongly that even in rural community colleges where study abroad leaders feel they have the support of the administration, this support is affirmed in official language related to institutional values in fewer than half of community colleges, and is rarely affirmed by prominent online display and promotion of current information about study abroad.

Theme 4: Administrative supports for study abroad may include funding and scholarships, marketing, passport assistance for students, and dedicated staff.

Participants indicated supports in addition to encouragement and permission that rural community colleges could provide to help study abroad programs flourish. Table 5 indicates the administrative supports for study abroad indicated by the data and the number of participants who reported receiving administrative support from their college.

Table 5.
Administrative Supports for Study Abroad

Administrative support	<i>N</i> of participants receiving support
Funding/scholarships	5
Marketing	2
Passport assistance for students	1
Dedicated staff	2

Note. Individual interviews were conducted with 13 participants, and the focus group included eight participants.

Funding in the form of scholarships was the most common type of administrative support offered in participants' rural community colleges. A focus group participant offered the following description of funding for study abroad and its sources:

I think that we are incredibly fortunate that we have funding that not only comes from our executive leadership team into study abroad but we have funding that comes directly from learning departments, so deans and associate deans are taking a lot at their budget and they're identifying exactly how much is going into our pot of money

to then support the leaders so that we don't have to put that cost onto students (focus group participant).

An individual interview participant described the following funding sources:

There's financial support for student scholarships. And that came out of basically advancement. And we have three foundation funds that are endowed funds that provide scholarships specifically for study abroad. So that's huge institutional support. (Kyle)

Other sources of funding included ally communities and alumni networks. Data indicated that study abroad programs were funded when rural community college leadership and the community were persuaded of "the value of creating a global student" (focus group participant).

Two participants reported that they received support at their community colleges with advertising or spreading word-of-mouth about study abroad. One participant stated:

I get a lot of question from parents who are in the administration, whose children go to school there, and, you know, about how their students might be able to participate—I have a lot of those—and then, in general, they help me disseminate materials, they direct students to me that express interest. (Ian)

Other sources of support for marketing or spreading word included the community college's public relations office or the rural community colleges' internal publications, which helped study abroad leaders with, "getting it [study abroad] out there, getting it into the ether, making sure people are excited about it" (Jane). One participant described the assistance a rural community college gave students who needed to obtain passports for study abroad:

We've had three passport days on campus, and the institution has been very supportive of that, and we'll have one more before the semester is over, and different

departments and programs on campus are sponsoring the passport fee for students.

(Lynn)

Two participants reported that their rural community colleges had dedicated staff to assist faculty with study abroad programs. A focus group participant described the benefits of employing dedicated study abroad staff:

They [administrators] created a study abroad coordinator position. So, I think that was huge, and certainly needed if you want to have a big push when it comes to study abroad. Before, it was ad hoc...And honestly what happened is, so much fell on the plate of the leader, and that's a lot to ask a full-time faculty member to take on, and honestly that's a lot! I mean, the health and safety aspect of it, orienting the students. You need to have somebody who lives and breathes that role—again that's my opinion—to really have a successful study abroad initiative at an institution (focus group participant).

Barriers to study abroad experiences at rural community colleges. Data used to address this research focus were drawn from individual and focus group interviews. Two themes emerged during data analysis to address the research focus.

Theme 5: The funding barrier. Thirteen out of 13 individual interview participants and four out of eight focus group participants indicated that obtaining the necessary funding was a barrier to implementing study abroad. Data indicated that when community colleges were unable to fund study abroad, the cost of the trip had to be divided among participating students. One participant estimated that participation was significantly reduced by a lack of funding:

It's very difficult to get financial support for these kinds of trips, and I've not had any just outside of the students being able to afford to go. The problem with that is that

there are probably another 30% of students who want to go, but do not have the financial wherewithal to do so. (Charles)

A different participant gave an example of the reduction in study abroad enrollment that had resulted from the diversion of expected funding:

Last year...we had about 40 students that would have gone to our program in Spain, had funding been available. The office of advancement...said to us...that there was about eight thousand dollars available in...targeted giving that had to be used in order for them to approach the donors again. So, she said, "That's great," told me about it, got the students, no worries, and then at the last minute...our CFO said, "Mm-mm, that money can't be used for that." So, then it was a situation where only students who could find monies elsewhere could go, and we had twelve [students, out of 40] left. (Lynn)

Reasons for the funding barrier included a lack of disposable income in rural communities and the need for rural community colleges to operate on a tight budget. Megan stated, "We've been cut budget-wise so much over the last five years that we don't even have the support to manage just our main campus students." Frida said, "We are a rural area where people do not have a lot of expendable cash." Thus, rural community colleges were in some cases unable to fund study abroad. However, participants whose rural community colleges could not afford to fund study abroad had been able to obtain funding from other sources.

Overcoming the funding barrier. Data indicated that rural community colleges could overcome the funding barrier to implementing study abroad through fundraising (i.e., selling items and/or soliciting donations), outside grants and scholarships, financial aid, discounts, and loans. Six individual interview and four focus group participants reported that they had been successful in fundraising for study abroad. Fundraising could be conducted by

selling items or by soliciting donations. Frida reported that her fundraising efforts on behalf of study abroad had involved selling items: “I do get support. People who will buy items, fundraising items, from the students. That’s from the president all the way down to your teachers and students.” In describing efforts to collect donations for study abroad, another participant stated,

On my own, I have gone to area businesses and private donors within my region and talked to them about sponsoring students, and so sometimes I’ve been able to give a student an entire trip. I had one person who just wrote me a check for \$3,000 and said, “Send somebody on the trip.” So, it was a full scholarship outside of anything else that we were doing (Jane).

Students could also solicit donations, according to one participant. Jane provided the following statement:

The students and I actually did a lot of fundraising together. Kind of small, community-based type stuff. And, honestly, probably our most successful fundraiser, was standing outside of Walmart, and the students were just like, “Hey, I’m going on this trip, is there any way you’d be interested in helping me?” And they made a great deal of money that way. And we had to go to a different town’s Walmart, though, because we’re so small we don’t have a Walmart [laughs] at the time.

A third participant had successfully sought sponsors: “we take sponsorships that go on our T-shirts” (Frida). Five individual interview participants indicated that they had obtained money for study abroad through outside grants and scholarships. One participant described a dedicated giving fund and the attempt to obtain grants and scholarships:

I have been exploring Gilman Scholarships and feel really encouraged about that, and I’ve learned about a couple of other options through Fulbright. We have started an

annual internal giving fund for international studies and probably four or five faculty members are contributing to that (Megan).

A different participant described a dedicated source of grant funding. Kyle stated the following example:

Our business industry, which is kind of one of the mixture of colleges, actually put together a new, like business grant, basically, of five thousand dollars that they award twice a year mostly to faculty who are leading programs or need money for a site visit (Kyle).

In speaking of the availability of financial aid to students, Lynn stated, “this past trip, some students have been able to get financial aid. It's usually two or three students.”

However, a different participant noted that students were often ineligible for financial aid during the summer, when many study-abroad trips were scheduled. Gretchen discussed the availability of discounts on room and board: “I received a discount from the places where the students stayed and from the International House, et cetera, for me to be there and take meals, et cetera, for having taken the students.” Helen had obtained loans for students to study abroad; which could be paid off in installments: “we worked with a provider to kind of, almost a—you didn’t have to be finished paying for it until even the end of the trip, in installments. We worked with what is now World Stride, a program provider that helps implement study abroad programs from start to finish.”

Triangulation of electronic data sources. The researcher attempted to obtain electronic data sources pertaining to funding for study abroad from the 11 rural community colleges represented by individual interviewees. Eight of the rural community colleges did not make information about funding study abroad available to students online. Of the three that included information about funding study abroad in their online materials about study abroad, one indicated that partial scholarships were available, one indicated that students

were responsible for the cost but that the community college supported student fundraisers for study abroad, and one indicated that students were responsible for the cost but that financial aid might be available, depending on the financial aid situation of the student. These findings confirmed that funding is a barrier to implementing study abroad, and that rural community colleges leaders provided minimal support for overcoming this barrier.

Theme 6: The buy-in barrier. Six out of 13 individual interview participants and five out of eight focus group participants indicated that gaining buy-in from students, students' families, and other faculty members was a barrier to implementing a successful and sustainable study abroad program. Data indicated that student buy-in was often difficult to gain because of the cost (to the student) of study abroad, both in paying for the trip and in lost wages, and/or because students were apprehensive about traveling for the first time. One participant discussed both aspects of the student buy-in barrier:

I think a couple hurdles that anybody trying to get a study abroad class or experiences, in our communities, the students are home bodies. Some of them might have never left the county, let alone the state or flew on an airplane. You have a lot of hesitation and fear of doing something like that and the prohibitive factor of cost. It can be very costly and a lot of our students, if it wasn't for state or federal funding, they couldn't even go to school so those are kind of the two biggest hurdles that we have. (Ian)

A focus group participant discussed the contribution of trip cost to the buy-in barrier: You're not only asking them [students] to pay for the study abroad trip, but they view it, often, as a loss of money because they won't be working—or their families might not want to lose their labor, so it's really a challenge to confront that issue of financial strain (focus group participant).

The importance of students' presence to the functioning of their households contributed to students' reluctance to travel, the same focus group participant indicated,

saying, “Most [rural community college] students live at home with their families, they also are often caretakers for their families, and for their siblings. And for their grandparents.” An individual interview participant explained in concrete terms why cost contributed so much to the barrier of gaining student buy-in:

Cost is honestly the biggest thing [barrier] for our students. Our short-term, faculty-leds are seen as the most affordable. Most of our programs range in price from two thousand to about thirty-five hundred, and that’s all-inclusive. That’s ticket, tuition, every housing, everything except just a few meals, essentially...sometimes our programs get as high as, you know, once they hit four thousand, it gets really hard to market to students. So, I’d say cost is always the number one barrier (Lynn).

Lynn added that students had often been reluctant to immerse themselves in an unfamiliar culture: “And then, location...if it’s outside of Western Europe it’s a lot harder for us to sell [to students].”

Kyle indicated that students might be reluctant to travel because their families were giving them misinformation about the people or culture the student would come into contact with on the trip: “when you have students that are fearful it’s because the family is feeding them information, fearful information.” A focus group participant also stated that when students were interested in studying abroad, gaining buy-in from the student’s family was often a barrier, particularly at rural community colleges:

There are other students...where it’s also not just convincing the student, but having the student convince their family. That happens a lot with our Hispanic students that they don’t want them to leave or they wonder, “Well, why’re you going to Japan?” you know, or Madagascar...it’s not just the student, I think it’s that kind of greater community and family piece that oftentimes you really see prevalent in the community college, because most of our students are still living with their families,

and that's such a big piece. So, we've also been trying to look at that as well, how to kind of involve the families, the whole kind of bigger family (focus group participant).

A focus group participant said of gaining buy-in from other faculty members (in order to expand study abroad), "right now I don't think many of those instructors or leaders believe that it's [study abroad is] of value." Lynn said, "there's a few departments that are kind of anti-study abroad," and said of getting faculty to attend a two-hour training about study abroad, "it's like pulling teeth."

Overcoming the buy-in barrier. As discussed above, students were often reluctant to study abroad because of the cost of the program and because they were apprehensive about leaving familiar environments. Study abroad leaders could overcome students' reluctance to travel by assertively marketing the benefits to students of studying abroad. One participant described the benefits in the following terms:

Most of them [students] said it [studying abroad] was a life altering event, in a good way. To either give them more passion for the program that they're in or to open their eyes to how big the world is and other cultures and experiences. It just kind of fuels their academic desires (Ian).

Data indicated that the barrier to gaining student buy-in was often a result of the resistance of the student's family to study abroad. Participants had overcome the barrier of gaining family buy-in in two ways: by speaking directly to the family, and by including faculty whom the family trusted in the study abroad trip. A participant described the process of communicating with families about study abroad:

In one of these surveys that I do with the students, I ask them, "Is it okay if me or my program assistant can contact your family?" And then I ask for the name and the cell phone number. Because, you know, sometimes you've got to go there. The student,

you know, says, “You know, I really want to do it, but my mom says I can’t, my dad says I can’t.” You know, you call and you have a conversation, and, you know, often it’s just misconceptions. You know, you can dispel those rumors and everything is okay, but you’ve got to include—well, we have to include our families in the whole education about study abroad (Kyle).

Another participant described the process of making families comfortable by including trusted faculty and staff on the trip:

The fear factor is real...so in order to increase our numbers we had to figure out how to make it make sense to our students. So, faculty-led study abroad experiences is what I spearheaded: getting faculty, groups of students, and a staff person to go abroad made more sense for our families. They were more comfortable, because they knew the people that were going with their children, or their students, and it helped a lot. So, our numbers are growing by leaps and bounds as a result of that, and we’re hopeful that the students that participate in the faculty-led experience will go again (Lynn).

The barrier to gaining faculty buy-in could be overcome by encouraging faculty and administrators to join study abroad trips and by pointing out the benefits to students, one participant said:

I really think that we should be encouraging other faculty members to join us on these study abroad trips, as well as administrators, of course, because, I think it’s really important to teach other people that this is possible. It’s possible to lead study abroad trips, even at a small, rural community college, and that it’s possible, and it’s rewarding and it’s a lot of fun, you get a lot out of it, and your students really get a lot out of it, too (Ellen).

Summary

The overarching research focus for the study was: How can rural community colleges develop successful and sustainable study abroad experiences? Findings indicated that successful and sustainable study abroad experiences had the following characteristics:

- The study abroad leaders were driven organizers: faculty members at the rural community college had the motivation, organizational ability, and initiative to envision a study abroad program, to plan and budget the trip in detail, to obtain the necessary administrative approvals, to market the trip effectively and aggressively to students, and to work “24/7” during the trip to ensure a successful experience.
- The study abroad leaders were good at building relationships: study abroad leaders were persistent in seeking support for study abroad from other faculty members, aggressive in marketing study abroad to students, and able to build personal connections and relationships of trust with individual students, overcoming their apprehensiveness about leaving familiar environments. The necessary quality for a faculty leader was often referred to by participants as *charisma*.
- To be sustainable, a study abroad program must have at least the full endorsement and encouragement of administrators and the rural community college as a whole. Particularly when funding and other resources were not available to support a study abroad program at a rural community college, “personal and institutional encouragement” from administrators was indispensable in making a program successful and sustainable. Permissive indifference on the part of administrators was not considered sufficient.

- To help a study abroad program to flourish, rural community college administrators can provide funding to reduce costs to students, dedicated staff to assist faculty with planning and marketing, and assistance to students who need to obtain passports.
- Funding is often a barrier to a successful and sustainable study abroad program. If the rural community college cannot fund the program, study abroad leaders and students can overcome the funding barrier through fundraising (i.e., selling items and/or soliciting donations), seeking outside sources of funding such as grants and scholarships, seeking discounts on room and board, and helping students to obtain loans and financial aid.
- Gaining buy-in from students, students' families, and faculty was often a barrier to implementing study abroad. Student buy-in could be gained by lowering costs and building personal connections between the study abroad leader and individual students. Family buy-in could be gained when the study abroad leader spoke directly to parents and when trusted (by the family) faculty and staff were included in the trip. Buy-in from other faculty could be gained by including them in study abroad trips and pointing out the ways in which the program benefited students.

Chapter 5 includes interpretation and implications of these findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

An increasingly diverse society and interconnected world require that today's students gain cultural awareness to be competitive (Smith, 2011), and studying abroad is one means of achieving this goal (Clarke et al., 2009). Study abroad programs for undergraduate students are known to promote not only cultural awareness, but also academic success and retention (Raby et al., 2014) and personal and professional growth (Younes & Asay, 2003). However, the vast majority of study abroad participants come from four-year institutions. In the 2014-2015 academic year, for example, community college students accounted for only 1.8% of the total number of American study-abroad participants (IIE, 2016), although community colleges educate nearly half of the nation's undergraduates (Manns, 2014). Despite the large number of students potentially affected by the underrepresentation of community colleges in study abroad, few researchers have investigated why community college participation in study abroad programs is so sparse and how it can be improved (Robertson, 2015).

For rural community colleges, the scarcity of research on study abroad is even more pronounced. For the purposes of this study, a rural community college was defined as a publicly controlled community college located in a large geographic area and serving a widely dispersed population of fewer than 100,000 residents (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007; Vineyard, 1979). According to current trends in community colleges, as of fall 2014, approximately 42% of community college students attend rural campuses (Ma & Baum, 2016) and rural community colleges are providing access to postsecondary education for an increasing number of underserved students, including racial and ethnic minorities, students with learning disabilities, and students from low-income households (Cohen et al., 2014). Previous researchers have found that studying abroad may be particularly valuable to students

from groups which have traditionally been underserved in higher education (Kuh, 2008; Raby, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine, understand, and describe the development of successful short-term study abroad experiences at rural community colleges. One overarching research questions guided the study, and to provide further guidance, the main research focus was divided into three areas:

How can rural community colleges develop successful and sustainable study abroad experiences?

1. What skills and characteristics are required in a study abroad leader at a rural community college?
2. What senior administrative support is required for a successful and sustainable study abroad program, at a rural community college?
3. What are the barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad experiences at rural community colleges? How have successful programs overcome these barriers?

To address these research foci, the researcher conducted a qualitative inquiry using data from three sources, collecting data through: (a) semi-structured interviews with 13 study abroad leaders from 11 rural community colleges, (b) a focus group of eight study abroad leaders from two rural community colleges, and (c) analysis of electronic data sources from 11 rural community colleges. Through prior experience as a leader of study abroad at a community college, the researcher have met and interacted with a number of leaders at study abroad programs. Through snowball sampling, the researcher selected participants who would be able to provide rich data to address the research foci. Individual and focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher uploaded the

transcripts into NVivo 12 software and analyzed them using the six-step procedure for thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Electronic data sources were reviewed for all 11 of the rural community colleges represented in the individual interviews. Electronic data sources included: mission and vision statements, as well as statements of institutional values and goals (to indicate the degree to which rural community college administration had incorporated globalization and/or study abroad into institutional values); informational documents for students, parents, staff, and faculty about study abroad (to indicate the amount, quality, and availability of the information); and informational documents for students indicating how to pay for study abroad (to indicate available funding sources).

Two themes emerged during data analysis to indicate the required skills and characteristics of a study abroad leader at a rural community college (sub question 1), including: (a) study abroad leaders should be motivated and organized, and (b) study abroad leaders should be good at building relationships. The study abroad leaders were driven organizers: faculty members at the rural community college had the motivation, organizational ability, and initiative to envision a study abroad program, to plan and budget the trip in detail, to obtain the necessary administrative approvals, to market the trip effectively and aggressively to students, and to work “24/7” during the trip to ensure a successful experience. The study abroad leaders were also good at building relationships: study abroad leaders were persistent in seeking support for study abroad from other faculty members, aggressive in marketing study abroad to students, and able to build personal connections and relationships of trust with individual students who overcame students’ apprehensiveness about leaving familiar environments. The necessary quality for a faculty leader was often referred to by participants as charisma.

Two themes emerged to indicate what administrative support is required for study abroad to be successful and sustainable at a rural community college (sub-question 2), including: (a) study abroad is not sustainable without administrative encouragement, and (b) administrative supports for study abroad may include funding and scholarships, marketing, passport assistance for students, and dedicated staff. To be sustainable, a study abroad program must have at least the full endorsement and encouragement of administrators and the rural community college as a whole. Particularly when funding and other resources were not available to support a study abroad program at a rural community college, “personal and institutional encouragement” from administrators was indispensable in making a program successful and sustainable. Permissive indifference on the part of administrators was not considered sufficient. To help a study abroad program to flourish, rural community college administrators can provide funding to reduce costs to students, dedicated staff to assist faculty with planning and marketing, and assistance to students who need to obtain passports.

Finally, two themes emerged to indicate barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad at rural community colleges, including: (a) the funding barrier, and (b) the buy-in barrier. Funding is often a barrier to a successful and sustainable study abroad program. If the rural community college cannot fund the program, study abroad leaders and students can overcome the funding barrier through fundraising (i.e., selling items and/or soliciting donations), seeking outside sources of funding such as grants and scholarships, seeking discounts on room and board, and helping students to obtain loans and financial aid. Regarding the buy-in barrier, gaining buy-in from students, students’ families, and faculty was often a barrier to implementing study abroad. Student buy-in could be gained by lowering costs and building personal connections between the study abroad leader and individual students. Family buy-in could be gained when the study abroad leader spoke directly to parents and when trusted (by the family) faculty and staff were included in the trip.

Buy-in from other faculty could be gained by including them in study abroad trips and pointing out the ways in which the program benefited students.

Findings Related to the Literature

This discussion of the findings' relationship to the literature is organized by research sub-focus. The discussion indicates the ways in which the findings in the present study confirm, conflict with, or extend the findings of previous researchers.

Sub-focus 1: The skills and characteristics required in a study abroad leader at a rural community college. The findings of the present study indicated that a study abroad leader at a rural community college should be motivated and organized, and should be good at building relationships. Findings further indicated that study abroad leaders at rural community colleges should be motivated and organized because study abroad experiences at these institutions tended to be faculty-initiated, with a faculty leader developing the design for the study abroad experience and marketing it to administrators, other faculty, and students. This finding was expected and confirmed the findings of Medora and Roy (2017). In their recommendations for faculty leaders of short-term study abroad programs, Medora and Roy (2017) cited many of the same applications of faculty-leader organization and motivation described by participants in this study, including the need to plan a detailed itinerary, to recruit a sufficient number of students, and to keep track of students 24 hours a day and deal with unexpected illnesses and emergencies during the study abroad experience itself.

Medora and Roy (2017) further indicated that faculty leaders of short-term study abroad need to be able to connect and form relationships with students to recruit them for the experience. This was confirmed by the finding in the present study. However, a review of this study's findings indicated applications of faculty-leader organization, motivation, and relationship-building that extended the recommendations of Medora and Roy (2017).

Participants in this study noted that students were sometimes difficult to recruit, not only because the cost of the study abroad experience was prohibitive for them, but because they or their families felt significant anxiety about the prospect of their leaving the country. Faculty leaders in the present study indicated that this difficulty was especially pronounced in rural community colleges, where a large proportion of students may have never previously left their home state or flown on a plane. Building relationships with students by sharing personal experiences and by being passionate and positive about study abroad was seen by participants as a means of helping students to overcome these anxieties and benefit from study abroad.

Additionally, study abroad leaders at rural community colleges may be more likely to face a situation in which study abroad is not integrated into the institution's mission (Raby, 2008). Thus, it is particularly important for faculty leaders at rural community colleges to market study abroad to administrators and other faculty to elicit the necessary financial and administrative supports. The need for faculty leaders to be motivated and even passionate about study abroad should be given particular emphasis in the context of rural community colleges, where a low overall level of motivation on the part of faculty (Cejda, 2010) may make the increased financial, cultural, and institutional barriers to study abroad even more difficult to overcome. Raby (2007) and Cejda (2010) indicated that community-college faculty motivation and job satisfaction may be increased through adequate pay, and through faculty involvement in the development of study abroad programs.

Sub-focus 2: Senior administrative support required for a successful and sustainable study abroad program at a rural community college. The findings of the present study indicated study abroad is not sustainable without administrative encouragement, and that beneficial administrative supports for study abroad may include funding and scholarships, marketing, passport assistance for students, and dedicated staff (in

the form of administrators and/or clerical staff whose role is to support study abroad). Raby (2007) has argued that one of the most influential determinants of the success of a study abroad program is institutional support. However, researchers have also found that funding is one of the most commonly cited challenges to the growth and sustainability of study abroad programs at community colleges (Frost & Raby, 2009), particularly at rural community colleges (Thomas, 2019). The findings of the current study supported Raby's (2007) findings, indicating that institutional support was the *sine qua non* of a successful study abroad program.

Participants in the present study emphasized that a study abroad program could flourish at a rural community college without funding or other tangible institutional supports, provided that administrators and the institution as a whole actively encouraged study abroad and the faculty leaders who implemented it. Encouragement in such a case could mean as little as informal, verbal praise, encouragement, and recognition of study abroad leaders. In rural community colleges where administrators were indifferent to study abroad and withheld that minimal level of encouragement and support, participants believed that study abroad programs could not be sustainable.

This finding is noteworthy, because the other institutional supports described by participants (e.g. funding, scholarships, and dedicated staff) may be unattainable for rural community colleges, where funding shortages may be particularly acute (Cejda, 2010; Thomas, 2019). Thus, it was noteworthy that these tangible supports were cited as valuable by faculty leaders of successful study abroad programs at rural community colleges, but that study abroad programs were also sustainable at institutions where the only administrative support was cost-free verbal acknowledgement and encouragement. This finding indicated that successful and sustainable study abroad is attainable for rural community colleges, regardless of funding levels, provided that administrators value and foster study abroad.

Raby (2018) gave the following response in relation to the level of funding that was needed to initiate study abroad at a rural community college:

Just because you have a small student body does not mean you cannot have study abroad. Funding for the position of study abroad and funding for an office is often not reliant on size [of college]. I tell people to find a closet...put a sign outside of the closet that says study abroad office, and eventually, you will find a real office space that has a door and a window. (Rosalind Raby, personal communication, September 6, 2018)

Sub-focus 3: Barriers to successful and sustainable study abroad experiences at rural community colleges, and how successful programs have overcome these barriers.

The findings of the current study indicated that barriers included the funding barrier and the buy-in barrier. The challenge of funding study abroad is particularly acute at rural community colleges, where many students are from low-income families, and state and federal funding are under-allocated (Cejda, 2010; Thomas, 2019). Participants in the present study suggested a variety of ways in which the funding barrier can be overcome, however. These methods included grant-funding, scholarships to help students meet costs, student loans, travel discounts for educators, bank-funded payment plans, and local fundraising. Fundraising could be accomplished through faculty leaders' soliciting donations from local businesses, and through students' selling items or soliciting donations on campus or in public places in the community. Students and faculty at rural community colleges may have an advantage over their urban peers in fundraising efforts, given the tight-knit nature of rural communities and rural community colleges. The current study adds to the professional dialogue on the close relationship between rural communities and rural community colleges as presented in Howley, Chavis, and Kester (2013) and Sparks and Nuñez (2014).

The buy-in barrier was a challenge to faculty leaders of study abroad at rural community colleges because it was necessary to persuade students to participate in the experience, and also to persuade students' families to allow the students to participate. Previous researchers had cited funding as the primary barrier to students' willingness to participate in study abroad (Raby & Rhodes, 2004), but findings in this study indicated that in rural community colleges the reluctance of students to travel, and the reluctance of their families to allow them to travel, are also significant determinants of student participation. As discussed above, participants in this study indicated that some students were reluctant to travel because they had never left the state or country before, and had apprehensions about immersing themselves in a foreign culture or simply about the complex logistics of travel. Participants added that students from low-income families were often unable to leave job or elder-care duties for the length of time that even short-term study abroad required. Although these sources of reluctance were significant, participants stated that families were often more opposed to the students' traveling than the students themselves.

Participants indicated that some of these barriers could be overcome through building relationships. Students who were reluctant to travel and immerse themselves in a foreign culture became more willing when they felt personally connected to the faculty leader of the program. This finding was consistent with that of Medora and Roy (2017) to the same effect, but participants in this study emphasized that student anxiety was a more significant barrier in low-income and perhaps parochial rural areas than it was likely to be for the potentially more cosmopolitan students at urban schools. The barrier participants had encountered in the anxieties of students' families was also potentially more significant in the rural setting, again because of the lack of travel experience or significant intercultural exposure. Participants had succeeded in overcoming the barrier of family anxieties by building relationships with students' families, however. Participants who had succeeded in this respect reported that

they had conversed with some students' families in person or by phone on multiple occasions, and had advertised their availability to address the concerns of any student or family member. Through building relationships with students' families, faculty leaders had earned the trust that was necessary for families to allow students to participate in study abroad.

Unexpected Findings

The most unexpected and encouraging finding in this study was that rural community colleges that do not have the funding necessary to defray student costs for study abroad can still develop and sustain a successful program by offering institutional and administrative acknowledgement and encouragement to study abroad leaders. Such acknowledgement and encouragement may include the adoption of study abroad into institutional mission and vision statements, but may consist of as little as providing verbal praise and recognition to faculty who conceive of, organize, and find funding for study abroad. Although study abroad programs benefit when institutions are able to contribute funding to defray student costs, provide administrative support (e.g. in the form of a dedicated study abroad office), and help with marketing the program, faculty are often willing and able to find the necessary resources themselves, provided they are made to feel that their institution backs them. This finding was encouraging, because it indicated that underfunded rural community colleges could still provide their students with the benefits of study abroad at little or no cost to the college, by having institutional leaders who were vocal about their support for the experience.

Implications for Action

This section includes implications for action, with discussion of recommendations for practice based on the findings in this study. Next, the section includes recommendations for further research and a description of unexpected findings. The findings of the current study and the review of the literature indicated that funding was a significant barrier to the

implementation of sustainable study abroad programs in rural community colleges (Thomas, 2019), and that faculty leaders needed to possess a high level of motivation to implement study abroad successfully (Medora & Roy, 2017). The most significant implication for action by community college leaders that emerged from the current study was that rural community college leaders can enhance faculty motivation to implement study abroad programs *without funding*. Administrators and leaders need to acknowledge the importance of study abroad initiatives to rural students and rural communities, and they need to encourage the efforts of study abroad leaders, even if only informally. This finding was consistent with Raby's (2007) finding that institutional support was the primary determinant of a study abroad program's success, but it is significant that a consensus among participants in this study indicated that the necessary level and form of institutional support is attainable at any rural community college where administrators are in favor of study abroad.

Although institutional funding for additional support for study abroad programs is often unobtainable at rural community colleges, findings in the present study indicated implications for action in the event that some funding can be found. The greatest barrier to study abroad, according to participants, was funding the program. Institutional assistance in meeting the costs of the program to students were considered particularly beneficial, and it is recommended that administrators provide it when possible. Additional beneficial supports that administrators should implement, if possible, included a dedicated study abroad office with dedicated administrators and staff to assist faculty leaders with planning and marketing study abroad trips. It was noteworthy, however, that participants believed that even when a dedicated study abroad office existed, study abroad experiences had the best chance of realization and success when faculty leaders envisioned them and brought them to the study abroad office, rather than when the study abroad office conceived of an experience and sought faculty leaders. Marketing a study abroad experience was considered one of the most

challenging aspects of realizing a successful program, particularly given the tendency of rural community college students to shy away from intercultural exposure, as findings in the present study indicated. According to participants, one of the most beneficial functions of a dedicated study abroad office was that it could standardize marketing strategies and media across study abroad programs and assist faculty leaders with materials and design. Participants emphasized, however, that the impetus for marketing needed to come from faculty leaders, who remained responsible for “beating the drums” to gain the necessary level of support from students, other faculty, and administrators.

The third recommended action is that study abroad programs should be faculty-initiated. Participants indicated that study abroad programs were far more likely to have the leadership that was necessary for them to flourish if they were conceived of and planned primarily by faculty leaders. Faculty leaders who had envisioned study abroad programs and carried those programs through the necessary planning stages were more likely to have the passion and commitment that was necessary to inspire students to join the experience, to obtain the necessary administrative support, and to provide the kind of “24/7” oversight and leadership that was necessary during the experience itself. Findings suggested that the process of conceiving of and planning a study abroad program could function as a kind of proving ground, in which faculty leaders could develop or demonstrate the needed organizational ability and prove that they had the high level of commitment that was necessary to make the experience transpire smoothly.

Further implications for practice may be found in the methods participants in this study used to overcome the funding barrier, which is important at underfunded rural community college. As discussed above, participants found that study abroad programs at rural community colleges can be successfully and sustainably funded through various combinations of public and private grants, scholarships, student loans, bank loans, travel

discounts, and local fundraising initiatives led by interested students and faculty leaders. Recommended fundraising activities include soliciting donations or selling items either on the campus or in public places in the community, and soliciting donations from local businesses.

The findings further indicated that gaining buy-in for study abroad from students and students' families may be particularly challenging at rural community colleges. Faculty leaders may overcome this barrier, however, by building relationships with students and their families. Participants cited the ability to build relationships with students as one of the most important characteristics of faculty leaders, because personal, individualized engagement helped leaders to overcome the reluctance of rural students to travel long distances and immerse themselves in foreign environments. Participants further indicated that students' families often constituted a more significant area of resistance to study abroad than the students themselves, but that they had been able to overcome this barrier by building relationships with families. Faculty leaders are therefore advised to advertise their availability to address the concerns of students and students' families, either by phone or in person. Faculty leaders should be willing to communicate with families repeatedly about the benefits of study abroad, such that a relationship and trust are established.

Recommendations for structural changes. It is recommended that rural community colleges implement structural changes in support of study abroad. Study abroad is consistent with a neoliberal program of education, which Levin (2007) describes as increasingly prevalent in community colleges as these institutions respond to market pressures to educate students according to the needs of business and industry, rather than according to the desires of the students and communities they serve. Kater (2017) likewise suggested that neoliberal philosophies are increasing the corporatization and market-driven behavior of community colleges and diminishing the role of leadership. Study abroad at rural community colleges

may also be evidence of Ayers' (2011) suggestion, that a changing global mission allows community colleges to increasingly empower student to "engage in sociopolitical processes at a global scale" (p.303). While results in the present study indicated that a study abroad program can exist when study abroad leaders are provided with no institutional support beyond encouragement from administrators, results also indicated that study abroad programs are more likely to be sustainable when structural changes are made in the college to support study abroad. Sustainability in a study abroad program requires motivated faculty leaders, and faculty motivation is enhanced by informal administrative encouragement and support. However, there is an increased cost to faculty leaders and students if structural changes are not implemented.

Faculty leaders who have to develop and market a study abroad experience without the support of a dedicated study abroad office are without guidance, materials, administrative support, and dedicated forums for the advertisement and promotion of the experience. Faculty leaders who must market a study abroad program without these supports have to start "from scratch," and are more likely to fail through inadequate marketing savvy even when the dedication and organizational ability that are needed for study abroad are present. Faculty leaders who lack the support of dedicated study abroad administrators and staff may struggle to find the most advantageous partnerships, both with entities in the college's community and with service providers at the study abroad destination. The existence of a dedicated study abroad office and staff allows faculty leaders to bring their study abroad concepts to a pre-existing set of marketing strategies and materials and organizational partnerships, such that the leader's energy may be focused on planning an optimum experience and in developing the necessary relationships with students and their families.

The cost of study abroad may be prohibitive (Thomas, 2019), both for faculty leaders and for students who would otherwise participate. Results in the present study indicated that

the most significant assistance a rural community college can provide to its study abroad programs is financial, in the form of defraying the costs of the experience for students and faculty leaders. A further structural change that may be implemented to assist in meeting the expense of study abroad is the implementation of partnerships between the college and other colleges, universities, or corporations (Thomas, 2019). Interinstitutional collaboration with other institutions of higher education can allow a single experience to be planned for students at two or more institutions, such that faculty leaders have the support of colleagues and a larger number of students can potentially be enrolled, thus distributing the cost of the experience over more students and lowering the expense for each participant (Thomas, 2019).

Collaboration between rural community colleges and businesses in support of study abroad may take several forms, all of which contribute to meeting the substantial cost of study abroad. Business leaders in the college's community may choose to create grants or scholarships for students wishing to study abroad, thus contributing to the financial feasibility of the experience for one or more students. Alternatively, business leaders may choose to sponsor study abroad (e.g. a participant in the present study reported that a business had sponsored study abroad, and, in exchange, the students had worn shirts with the business's logo). Thirdly, businesses may contribute to fundraising, either by allowing students and faculty leaders to conduct fundraising on their premises, or by donating products that students can sell on the college campus or elsewhere to raise money. Partnerships will be more stable if they are implemented at the level of the rural community college, rather than between specific faculty members and businesses or other institutions. Collaborations that are dependent on a faculty member are in danger of dissolving if the faculty member departs, and may therefore fail to contribute to the sustainability of study abroad. Partnerships that are formed through structural changes in the college, however, are more likely to continue across changes in faculty and staff.

An additional structural change may be made in support of study abroad by structuring the curriculum at rural community colleges to include study abroad (McKee, 2019). While it is necessary for students to be able to receive course credit for study abroad, study abroad is unlikely to be a requirement in the curriculum for any program of study at a rural community college. Implementing structural changes that build study abroad into the curriculum and into the continuing education programs at rural community colleges may help to overcome the tendency of rural students to be reluctant to participate in study abroad, as well as the reluctance of students' families to allow students to participate. Structuring curriculum to include study abroad would contribute to the globalization component of the mission of some rural community colleges, and would ensure that students received the benefits of study abroad. Given that rural community college students may derive even more significant benefits from study abroad than their urban or four-year university peers, structuring the curriculum at rural community colleges to include study abroad may be a particularly valuable structural change (McKee, 2019). If there are not changes in some basic structural elements, nothing will improve for study abroad at rural community colleges.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given the elevated urgency of the funding barrier for faculty leaders of study abroad at rural community colleges, it is recommended that future researchers conduct further investigations into the ways in which these leaders have overcome that barrier. Due to the aforementioned funding needs, actionable fundraising programs must be developed and transferable to study abroad leaders at other rural community colleges for implementation. Additionally, given the importance of institutional support for study abroad programs, at rural community colleges, it is recommended that future researchers investigate the various degrees and opportunities to which institutions and administrations can support study abroad programming at rural community colleges. Thereby, enhancing administrations' ability to

better support the financial needs of future study abroad programs and participants; which would ensure successful implementation of said programs.

The present research was focused exclusively on the perspectives of faculty leaders, administrators, and study abroad office directors. Previous researchers have established that study abroad is beneficial to students from rural community colleges (Thomas, 2019) and that study abroad may be particularly beneficial to a population increasingly served a rural institutions: those historically under-served by higher education (Kuh, 2008; Raby, 2007). Given the significant anxiety about study abroad on the part of rural students and their families, further study of the lived experiences of rural community college students who have participated in study abroad is warranted. Such research may be used to explore the specific factors that were most decisive in persuading these students to participate in study abroad programs, and in persuading their families to let them.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the development of sustainable short-term study abroad experiences at rural community colleges. To achieve this, the researcher conducted a qualitative inquiry using data from three sources, including: semi-structured interviews with 13 study abroad leaders from 11 rural community colleges; a focus group of eight study abroad leaders from two rural community colleges; and analysis of electronic data sources from 11 rural community colleges. Findings indicated that a study abroad leader at a rural community college should be motivated and organized, and should be good at building relationships. Additionally, findings indicated that study abroad is not sustainable at a rural community college without administrative encouragement, and that barriers to implementing study abroad at these institutions include a scarcity of funding and the challenge of persuading rural students to participate.

The most significant implication of the findings was that the benefits of study abroad programs are attainable for students and faculty at all rural community colleges. Perhaps the most significant implication for practice that emerged from this study was that rural community colleges can enhance faculty motivation and implement successful study abroad programs *without funding* if administrators simply acknowledge and encourage the efforts of study abroad leaders, even if only informally and verbally. Findings further indicated that study abroad programs at rural community colleges can be successfully and sustainably funded through various combinations of federal, state, and private grants, scholarships, student loans, payment plans on bank loans, travel discounts, and local fundraising initiatives. Lastly, students and their families can overcome their anxieties about travel and immersion in a foreign culture when faculty leaders are willing to take the initiative in building trusting personal relationships with them.

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APPENDIX A:
Interview Protocol for Pilot Focus Group

Opening Script

Welcome. Thank you for participating in a focus group about study abroad opportunities on your campus. Our discussion is expected to last about a half hour and is being recorded for research purposes only. As you know, I am Michelle Lieberman, and I will be the moderator.

Just so you are aware, a focus group is a discussion about your opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. If you have a question or want to comment on something, please do so. I encourage all of you to participate in the discussion--everyone's ideas and opinions are valued. If at any point you become uncomfortable and want to stop participating, you are welcome to leave.

Informed Consent Form

See Appendix B. Hand out and collect.

Study Description and Contact Information

See Appendix C. Hand out for participants to keep.

Interview Questions

1. How many study abroad trips have you lead or organized?
2. Do you remember the name of the study abroad locations and the approximate number of participants involved?
3. What types of study abroad programs are you aware of? Which types from the list do you think are most beneficial to students?

4. Are there any trips that were organized, but were not successful?
5. Do you fundraise for these trips? If so, what type of fundraisers have you conducted?
6. Do you offer the study abroad for course credit? If so, how many credit hours can the student earn while on the study abroad trip?
7. Do you feel your administration fully supports the colleges to take part in study abroad programs?
8. Does your college have a study abroad office or do faculties arrange their own trips?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

(Give everyone time to fill it out. Collect.)

Thank you for your time today. We hope you have a great day. Goodbye.

APPENDIX B:
Focus Group Protocol

Opening Script

Welcome. Thank you for participating in a focus group about study abroad opportunities on your campus. Our discussion is expected to last about a half hour and is being recorded for research purposes only. As you know, I am Michelle Lieberman, and I will be the moderator.

Just so you are aware, a focus group is a discussion about your opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. If you have a question or want to comment on something, please do so. I encourage all of you to participate in the discussion--everyone's ideas and opinions are valued. If at any point you become uncomfortable and want to stop participating, you are welcome to leave.

Informed Consent Form

See Appendix D. Hand out and collect.

Study Description and Contact Information

See Appendix E. Hand out for participants to keep.

Interview Questions

1. How many study abroad trips have you lead or organized?
2. Do you remember the name of the study abroad locations and the approximate number of participants involved?
3. Are there any trips that were organized, but were not successful?

4. It is often difficult to find financial resources for the trips. What are some of the ways you seek financial support?
5. How are study abroad courses related to the academic programs at your institution?
6. Institutional support is another part of developing a program. Could you describe to me ways in which your institution have supported or not supported your program?
7. Program leaders are an important component of a successful program. What have you learned about finding effective program leaders at your college?
8. Putting together a strong study abroad program takes a lot of time and dedication. Does your college have a study abroad office or do faculties arrange their trips?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

(Give everyone time to fill it out. Collect.)

Thank you for your time today. We hope you have a great day. Goodbye.

APPENDIX C:**Protocol for Personal Interviews****Opening Script**

Welcome. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview about study abroad opportunities on your campus. Our discussion today is expected to last no more than a half hour and is being recorded for research purposes only. As you know, I am Michelle Lieberman, and I will be the interviewer today.

Just so you are aware, this interview is a discussion about your opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. If you have a question or want to comment on something, please do so. I encourage you to participate in the discussion as much as you feel comfortable--all ideas and opinions are valued. If at any point you become uncomfortable and want to stop participating, you are welcome to leave.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Informed Consent Form

(See Appendix B. Hand out and collect.)

Please take a minute to fill this informed consent form for us. (Give time.) Are there any questions about this?

Study Description and Contact Information

(See Appendix C. Hand out for participants to keep.)

Interview Questions

1. How many study abroad trips have you lead or organized?
2. Do you remember the name of the study abroad locations and the approximate number of participants involved?
3. Are there any trips that were organized, but were not successful?
4. It is often difficult to find financial resources for the trips. What are some of the ways you seek financial support?
5. How are study abroad courses related to the academic programs at your institution?
6. Institutional support is another part of developing a program. Could you describe to me ways in which your institution have supported or not supported your program?
7. Program leaders are an important component of a successful program. What have you learned about finding effective program leaders at your college?
8. Putting together a strong study abroad program takes a lot of time and dedication. Does your college have a study abroad office or do faculties arrange their trips?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

(See Appendix D. Hand out and collect.)

Closing

Thank you for your time today. Are there any questions? (wait to answer if needed). Have a great rest of your day. Goodbye.

APPENDIX D:**Informed Consent Document****OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY**

PROJECT TITLE: Sustainability of Study Abroad Programs at Rural Community Colleges

INTRODUCTION: The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research and to record the consent of those who say YES.

RESEARCHERS:

The Responsible Principal Investigator is Dr. Mitchell Williams, Professor at Old Dominion University, Darden College of Education, Community College Leadership.

The primary investigator is Michelle Lieberman, Ph.D. Candidates in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University, Darden College of Education.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of this study is to understand the components of a successful short-term study abroad experience at a community college. It will also examine how study abroad is beneficial to community college students. The study will include a qualitative survey, interviews of leaders of community college short-term study abroad programs, with the goal of developing practices to enhance the sustainability of short-term study abroad programs.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of the benefits and success of community college short-term study abroad programs. If you say YES, then your participation will last for half an hour to an hour. Several other administrators of short-term study abroad programs will also be participating in this study.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA: There are no exclusionary criteria that would keep volunteers from participating in this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: **RISKS:** If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of being identified as a participant in this study. The researchers tried to reduce these risks by removing all identifying information and using codes for each participant instead of names. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is to provide valuable information that community colleges may use to help promote and sustain study abroad programs.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS: The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION: If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The researchers will take reasonable effort to keep private information, such as the focus group discussion and demographics, confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from the information, destroy the recording of the focus group, and store all identifying information in a locked filing cabinet separate from other research materials. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE: It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY: If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. There is no foreseeable illness or injury issues that should occur.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researcher should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researcher should be able to answer them:

Michelle Lieberman, 301-387-3016, mlieb005@odu.edu

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call the College of Education Human Subjects Committee.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	Date
---	-------------

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT: I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

INVESTIGATORS PRINTED NAME AND SIGNATURE:

_____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX E:

IRB Exemption Letter February 10, 2017



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Physical Address

4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Mailing Address

Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: February 10, 2017

TO: Mitchell Williams

FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [1024003-1] Best Practices for Leading a Community College Study Abroad Program

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: February 10, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # [6.2]

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Petros Katsioloudis at (757) 683-5323 or pkatsiol@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

APPENDIX F:

IRB Exemption Letter January 30, 2018



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Physical Address

4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Mailing Address

Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: January 30, 2018

TO: Mitchell Williams

FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [1189196-1] The Sustainability of Study Abroad Programs at Rural Community Colleges

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 30, 2018

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 6.2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Jill Stefaniak at (757) 683-6696 or jstefani@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

VITA

Education

PhD	Old Dominion University, Community College Leadership Dissertation: "Sustainability of Study Abroad Programs at Rural Community Colleges"	May 2019
Graduate Certificate	East Carolina University, Security Studies	May 2010
MS	East Carolina University, Criminal Justice	May 2010
MA	East Carolina University, Sociology	August 2002
BA	Queens University, Psychology	December 1992

Relevant Teaching Experience

A professor of both traditional and online courses, Michelle Lieberman has taught and directed programs in the departments of Sociology, Political Science, and Criminal Justice at the following institutions of higher education:

Garrett College , McHenry, MD	Aug 2013 - Present
University of Phoenix , Phoenix, AZ	January 2009 to August 2014
Beaufort Community College , Washington, NC	August 2010 to July 2013
East Carolina University , Greenville, NC	August 2008 to July 2013
Pitt Community College , Greenville, NC	August 2003 to May 2009
East Carolina University , Greenville, NC	August 2003 to May 2008

Courses designed and taught include:

Introduction to Sociology	Sociology of the Family	Leadership	Introduction to Criminal Justice
Social Problems	Principles of Sociology	Criminology	Social Psychology
Juvenile Delinquency	Ethics and Cultural Diversity	Ethics and Cultural Diversity	Social Diversity
Cultural Immersion and Leadership	State and Local Government	Juvenile Justice	Police Ethics
Basic Law Enforcement	Criminal Investigations	Diversity Issues in Criminal Justice	Courtship and Marriage and Modern Social Problems

Study Abroad Program Founder and Director

As a Director of Study Abroad Programs, one major responsibility is to serve as an international liaison who negotiates international cooperation and exchange between home and host universities and colleges; which includes establishing requirements and expectations, both educationally and from a tourism perspective, based on study abroad standards and US State Department recommendations.

Garrett College , McHenry, MD	May 2014- Present
Study Abroad Experiences Include:	

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costa Rica (2013, 2014, & 2019) • Ireland (2016) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germany, Switzerland, and Italy (2018) • Belize (2015) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nicaragua (2016 & 2017) • London & Paris (2014) |
|---|---|--|

Beaufort Community College, Washington, NC August 2010 to July 2013
Spanish immersion trip to Costa Rica 2013.

Special Programs & Additional Employment Experience
Garrett College, McHenry, MD **Backbone (Incarcerated) Youth Program Director**

East Carolina University, Greenville, NC **Criminal Justice Field Internship Coordinator**

East Carolina University, Greenville, NC **Director of Student Safety, Off-Campus & Community Services**

East Carolina University, Greenville, NC **Professor of Sociology (Regional Prison Program)**

East Carolina University, Greenville, NC **Police Officer/Reserve Officer**

Hickory Police Department, Hickory, NC **Police Officer**

Journal Publications

Lieberman, M.L., Knox, D., Zusman, M.E., "A "Novel" way to engage student interest: The Dancer's Gift as a review of core concepts," College Student Journal, August 2004

Zusman, M. E., Knox, D., Lieberman, M. L., "Gender Differences in Reaction to Course Requirements: Why are Females Better Students?" College Student Journal, December 2005

Presentations and Invited Lectures

- **Looking in before looking out: Utilizing an activity like "True Colors," to break the ice and promote group cohesion.** Maryland Community College International Education Consortium (MCCIEC) annual forum. **Reykjavik, Iceland.** Spring 2017.
- **Forum: Effective On-site Teaching for Global Awareness.** Maryland Community College International Education Consortium (MCCIEC) annual forum, **Havana, Cuba.** Spring 2015.
- **Maximizing Success with Providers in Faculty-Led Study Abroad at Community Colleges.** NAFSA Region VIII Conference, **Alexandria, VA.** November 2015

Professional Training

- **SafeZone Trainer Training Certification; SafeZone Train-The-Trainer Program,** 2018
- **Community Leadership Program - Facilitator Training Facilitator Certification;** The University of Georgia J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, 2016
- **General Police Instructor Certified,** 2001
- **Advanced Law Enforcement Certificate,** 2001
- **Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) Certified,** 1994.

Relevant Professional Affiliations

NAFSA

MCCIEC

Attended and graduated from Bridges Leadership Program, 2007

NCCPA Executive Board Member at Large on Diversity, 2005-2007

Secretary of the NC Law Enforcement Women's Association (NCLEWA), 1999-2003