LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: ACCESS AND ATTITUDES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDY

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LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: ACCESS AND ATTITUDES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDY

A Thesis

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Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Abstract

of

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: ACCESS AND ATTITUDES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDY

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Brief Literature Review

Immediately upon beginning this literature review it became clear that little to no research existed on the topic. As such, the author circumvented the topic and examined literature detailing with the importance of study abroad, the lack of diversity in study abroad, and issues LGBT students face in higher education that could result in a hesitancy to participate in international study.

Statement of the Problem

In this period of uncertainty over the future of higher education, the vitality of resources currently at risk are being ignored. The value of international study is widely documented. By exploring LGBT students’ participation in international study we are not only ensuring equal access to higher educational opportunities, we are also reinforcing policies of non-discriminatory practices at institutions of higher education.

Methodology

Qualitative data were collected from a large public university in northern California. The author developed an online survey questionnaire that could be completed with absolute anonymity by LGBT students who had either previously completed a study
abroad program or were going to in the future. With the support of the campus’s Education Abroad Center and LGBT Resource Center, several students participated in the study.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The overwhelming majority of LGBT students who participated in the study claimed that their sexual identity did not or would not affect their decision to study abroad nor would it affect their decision on where to go. While the majority of students claimed that they were satisfied with the resources available for LGBT students studying abroad, a desire for greater outreach was expressed. Upon further examination of the results, however, it became clear that participants in the study did not seek out information or resources for LGBT students participating in international study further indicating that their sexual identity was not a factor.

________________________, Committee Chair
Geni Cowan, Ph.D.

________________________
Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Countless studies and empirical evidence from both students and program administrators illustrate the benefits of participation in a study abroad program during post-secondary education (Carlson, Burns, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001). The academic benefits include greater second language acquisition (Freed, 1995; Yu, Chick, Morais, & Lin, 2008) and improved academic performance (Hadis, 2005; Teichler 2004). The documented personal benefits of participation in study abroad include increased marketability in the workforce (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2007), and increased self-confidence and independence (Hansel, 1988). Aside from these, arguably the greatest benefit to be gained from participation in study abroad is global competency as ours is an ever expanding global society and future success increasingly relies upon it (Levine, 2005).

The above benefits become more relevant to the success of post-secondary students when one considers that the quality of the United States’ educational system, in particular, higher education, is falling behind other developed countries. Studies have shown that the United States is falling behind in the quality, accessibility, and affordability of higher education (Usher & Cervenan, 2005; World University Rankings,
2005). Hence, promoting access to international study for U.S. students is more important than ever.

In acknowledging the importance of international education as a part of the post-secondary student experience, educational leaders must examine whether or not all students are being given equal access to this opportunity. While there is existing literature that examines and discusses the lack of diversity among study abroad participants, these studies focus on socioeconomic, racial, and gender inequities (IES, 2009; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pacarella, 2008) and do not make mention of sexual minority students. Noticeably absent from the conversation is the examination of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students’ presence in study abroad participation. A thorough examination of literature revealed that the issue of LGBT student participation in study abroad has not been conclusively explored.

Because of the absence of literature exploring LGBT student participation in study abroad, it is impossible to know if LGBT students are partaking in international education at the same rates as their non-LGBT peers. Examining literature that discusses the unique issues LGBT students face in higher education offers some insight into factors that may discourage this student population from studying abroad. Prevailing heteronormativity in institutions of education (Crocco, 2001) and fears about discrimination due to their sexual identity (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenbert, 2002) often cause LGBT students to not seek out the assistance they need to be successful in higher
education. It is especially relevant to information regarding study abroad, which contributes so highly to student success both before and after graduation.

Statement of the Problem

In this period of uncertainty over the future of higher education, the vital student services and resources are at risk of disappearing. The value of international study is widely documented and is an effective means of educating and developing future global leaders (Lincoln Commission, 2005). The opportunity should be extended to all students in higher education. By exploring LGBT students’ participation in international study higher education, leaders are not only ensuring equal access to higher educational opportunities but also learning how to better serve sexual minority students who wish to study abroad. A primary goal of leaders in higher education must be to promote diversity and guarantee that all students are given the same access to educational opportunities. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How much importance do LGBT students place on how their sexual identity will be received by a host culture when deciding whether or not to study abroad?

2. Can LGBT students find information pertinent to sexual minority students undertaking international study easily and without divulging their sexual identity to a university faculty or staff member?
3. What changes can be made on college campuses to make LGBT students more likely to consider study abroad and more prepared for study abroad?

Definitions of Terms Used

The following is a list of special terms and their definitions used in the study.

Study Abroad

For the purpose of this study this term is used as a noun to describe the participation of a U.S. student in a program of study in another country.

LGBT

An abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender and in this study is used as an inclusive term to refer to the community as a whole (UCDavis Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Center, 2010, ¶ 6).

Lesbian and Gay

To be lesbian or gay means that a person’s primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender.

Bisexual

To be bisexual means that a person’s primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward both people of the same gender and people of the opposite gender. For most lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, sexual identity includes more than just sexual attraction and behavior. Research points to the importance of additional
dimensions, such as emotional preferences, psychological attraction, falling in love, and self-identification (Klein, 1990).

Transgender

The University of California, Davis LGBT Resource Center’s website defines transgender as follows, “Used most often as an umbrella term, and frequently abbreviated to “trans” or “trans*” (the asterisk indicates the option to fill in the appropriate label, ie. Transman). It describes a wide range of identities and experiences of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on their assigned biological birth sex. Some commonly held definitions include:

1. Someone whose behavior or expression does not “match” their assigned sex according to society.
2. A gender outside of the man/woman binary.
3. Having no gender or multiple genders.
4. Some definitions also include people who perform gender or play with it.
5. Historically, the term was coined to designate a transperson who was not undergoing medical transition (surgery or hormones). (UCDavis Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Center, 2010, ¶ 44)
Limitations

The most notable limitation encountered in the study was the difficulty in identifying the size of the student population. As Sanlo et al. (2002) discuss, data on the population of LGBT students is unavailable because of these students’ resistance to self-identify. This resistance is the result of fear of discrimination or worse. As such, it was important to the writer that the study be conducted anonymously. While the students who did anonymously self-identify for the study gave rich feedback, without having an idea of how large the LGBT presence is on campus, it is difficult to say to what extent these respondents represent their peers.

Significance of the Study

The writer’s intent is that studying the impact a LGBT student’s sexual identity has on his/her decision to partake in international study will provide a framework and base of knowledge for future leadership in international education. The education of U.S. students needs to be internationalized in order to remain relevant in a global society. Former Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley stated, “Our nation’s future hinges significantly on the international competence of our citizens and that, in this day and age, to be fully educated is to be educated internationally” (National Association of Student Advisors [NAFSA], 2003, p. iii). By examining who is and is not studying abroad, leaders are ensuring that all students receive the same opportunity to excel.
The study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of higher education by giving campus administrators qualitative data to support increased examination of LGBT student participation in study abroad. Additionally, the study suggests improvements to existing resources and the manner in which these recourses are made available. The data from the study serves to provide leaders in education with a base of knowledge to continue to promote international education and ensure that all students are given the opportunity to benefit from it.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This document is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature organized by subtopics. The literature reviewed examines the benefits of study abroad, the importance of internationalizing higher education, diversity among study abroad participants, and issues for LGBT students at home and abroad. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study including the survey of LGBT students at a large public university to gauge their attitudes and experiences with international study. The data from this study is examined and analyzed in Chapter 4 and leads to the conclusions and recommendations that Chapter 5 discusses.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of the literature examines the assumption upon which the study is based, that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students are less likely than non-LGBT students to participate in study abroad during their post-secondary education. This assumption is shaped by the writer’s belief that LGBT students’ fear of discrimination abroad creates a hesitancy to pursue international study. The chapter begins by discussing studies that demonstrate the many benefits of study abroad including, but not limited to, language acquisition, improved academic performance, increased marketability of a student who has studied abroad when attempting to obtain a job post graduation, and perhaps most importantly, increased global and intercultural competency. Byram (1997) defined intercultural competency as:

Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role. (p. 34)

Additionally, this chapter explores the studies emphasizing the importance of internationalizing higher education not only because of the benefits to the students who partake in international study but because of the national benefits and internationalization is increasingly being viewed as the next great evolution of higher education.
Chapter 2 then examines literature that reflects the lack of racial, gender, and socioeconomic diversity among U.S. students participating in study abroad programs to draw parallels with the potential lack of diversity of sexual orientation in U.S. students studying abroad. In the absence of literature that explores the participation of LGBT students in international study, these sources offer insight into the various factors that dissuade a student from pursuing study abroad.

Lastly, this chapter examines the literature that discusses the adversity LGBT students potentially face when studying abroad. This comes primarily in the form of international laws, policies, and attitudes toward the LGBT community that could compromise LGBT students’ safety and well being.

Benefits of Study Abroad

There has been a push on college campuses to increase student participation in study abroad. Allan E. Goodman, President of the Institute International Education, stated, “Many U.S. campuses now include international education as part of their core education mission, recognizing that increasing the global competence among the next generation is a national priority and academic responsibility” (as cited in Dessoff, 2006, pp. 21-22). The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005) outlined a vision for one million undergraduate students to study abroad in a decade, representing about 50% of the number of undergraduate degrees (associate’s and bachelor’s) awarded annually in the U.S. The Commission noted the way in which the
nation will collectively benefit from this such as increasing national security and maintaining the U.S. position in globalization and economic competitiveness. But the study also recognizes that this is an increasingly global society and that students need to attain a cultural competency to be able to be successful as individuals (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005). U.S. students need to be prepared to enter an increasingly global workforce and an increasing competitive domestic workplace where the skills and knowledge gained from education abroad may give students an edge over their peers who did not participate in international study.

Aside from global competency, one of the fundamental benefits of study abroad is the enriching personal gains. Research has shown that this is due to the experiential nature of the education received. Wallace (1977) discussed how experiential learning, particularly cultural immersion, takes the intellectual awareness gained through rigorous scholarship and adds emotional awareness. In addition to these academic gains, Wallace stressed the personal gains such as increased self-confidence, greater self-awareness, and better interpersonal skills. Such qualities are gained from having successfully navigated a different culture with different norms and rules than one’s own home. Upon their return, students are better able and more willing to tackle new challenges.

Hansel (1988) concurred and further stated that in the experiential learning environment of cultural immersion, the experience is direct and not vicarious. In her survey of students who had participated in study abroad Hansel discovered said students showed marked gains in self-confidence, self and global awareness, and independence as
well as in their fundamental values. She noted that the students surveyed who had not participated in study abroad showed little to no growth in the same areas. The gains stem from maximized involvement with the host culture but not all students are ready to participate actively in host-culture activities due to shyness or fear of rejection. The argument could be made that LGBT students’ hiding of their sexual identity during a study abroad program would most likely fall into this category and they would not fully reap the benefits to be gained.

Part of the increased self-awareness that is the result of study abroad is a result of a greater understanding of one’s own self in relation to the world around one. Murray (1977) attributed this to the cultural immersion experience to be had in study abroad. In his essay examining the effects of cross-cultural learning Murray discussed his experience with students studying in Nepal. He noted how in experiential learning the learner becomes part of the learned and thus equal attention should be paid to the outer world (in his case, Nepal) and the inner world (the values, concepts, and roles of his students). The effect of this is a decrease in narcissism both internally for the student and to a greater degree, with regard to the student’s home school and government.

Along with the personal gains attributed to study abroad there are concrete academic gains to be found. Oftentimes, the personal and the academic are tied to one another. Yu et al. (2008) stated that foreign interaction gained through international study directly influence personal growth and career planning. Yu et al. studied 256 students who participated in study abroad and showed they returned with increased confidence,
independence and a different outlook on their studies and the world at large. The personal gains influenced their academic and career goals positively as well as their marketability. The foreign interaction at the root of these gains is largely due to interactions with foreign hosts. For the interactions to transpire, students must feel safe in their host culture and secure in their identity or interactions are surface and do not produce the gains Yu et al. (2008) discussed. Should, for example, a LGBT student not feel sufficiently at ease to regularly interact with their foreign hosts, he/she will not experience the same benefits as non-LGBT peers.

One of the most frequently documented academic benefits to be found in a study abroad returnee is acquisition of a second language. Freed (1995) confirmed the long-held belief that students who study abroad attain greater fluency levels than students whose language learning is restricted to U.S. on-campus education. In a study of 30 college students, 15 of whom studied abroad in France for a semester, 15 of whom remained at their home campus, Freed observed that the students who studied abroad were rated as having greater fluency when samples of the students’ speaking was rated by native French speakers. Freed explored what aspects of study abroad are so influential on students’ second language acquisition in her 1990 study of 40 undergraduate students who spent six weeks in France. It showed that out of the classroom language exposure had little effect on the language acquisition of her subjects. Those who actually did benefit from out of the classroom experiences were beginning to low-intermediate students interacting with host families and native speaking friends rather than reading
French newspapers or attending French films. While her study debunked a long-held belief that the out of classroom interactions of study abroad participants is the factor that most contributes to greater language facility, it is possible her findings are due to the limited amount of time spent in the host country. Freed herself acknowledged that she observed little gains at any level by her subjects, most likely attributed to the short duration of the program.

It should not be assumed, however, that a lack of language acquisition during a study abroad program can be solely blamed on the short duration of a program. Isabelli-Garcia’s (2003) case study of the language acquisition levels of three students participating in a semester-long study abroad program in Argentina recognized that a student’s comfort ability in a host country has a deep impact on the academic enrichment to be gained during study abroad. Isabelli-Garcia tracked the oral and written language acquisition of the three students, two males and one female, through their study journals and through one-on-one interviews with each subject. Taking into account that each subject started the program with a different level of language ability, the writer studied their progress throughout the program. While the results of the study indicated there was not a consistent level of language acquisition to be expected from participation in study abroad, it did illustrate that a student’s sense of security in a host country has an impact on their progress. In the case of the female student, her fear of rejection by her hosts inhibited her interactions with them and stalled her progress. The findings support the assumption that LGBT students studying abroad might not reap the same benefits from
study abroad if they are uncomfortable in a host culture due to their concerns about disclosing their sexual identity.

While language acquisition is certainly an important element of the benefit of study abroad in higher education, Hadis (2005) referenced the other academic gains to be found. Hadis researched students who studied abroad between 1997 and 2002 to gauge the academic impacts of study abroad. He found that students claimed their study abroad experiences gave them increased independence and open mindedness, which had been previously discussed. These gains can be linked with academic maturation. Hadis stated, “The higher the independence to make one’s own decisions as a result of having studied abroad, the higher one’s academic focusing” (p. 67). Returning students showed an increased curiosity in academic matters and a realization that learning has its intrinsic value.

Internationalization of Higher Education

According to Knight (1999), internationalization of higher education is “the process of systematic integration of an international dimension into the teaching, research, and public service function of a higher education institution (Knight, 1999, p. 4). The notion of internationalizing education is not new. Hamilton (1998) argued that the exchange of information and ideas through international cooperation and collaboration has been an aspect of university operations for decades and even centuries. However, increased attention is being given to this collaboration. Researchers are finding that
institutions of higher education have varying motivations for internationalizing their organization. Altbach and Knight (2007) discussed for-profit institutions like Sylvan Learning Systems and University of Phoenix entering the international market by establishing new institutions, purchasing existing institutions, and partnering with firms or educational institutions in other countries for increased profit. Conversely, Knight (2006) noted that the primary motivation of traditional nonprofit universities for entering the international market is not financial. These institutions are more concerned with advancing research and promoting cross-cultural awareness. Despite these differing motives for entering the international market, the students of both types of institutions benefit from the increased internationalization of their curricula.

Not only do students benefit from the internationalization of education but nations do as well. Researchers are acknowledging that it is important for the political and economic prosperity of the U.S. to develop global citizens (NAFSA, 2003). As a nation, the U.S. is struggling with how to best prepare its students for a globalized, post-September 11 world. Without a curriculum that adequately prepares students for becoming globally competent citizens upon graduation, the U.S. education system is not competing with the rest of the developed world (Dessoff, 2006).

Additionally, an international education is increasingly tantamount to a quality education (Council on International Educational Exchange [CIEE], 2006; Teichler, 2004). This no longer pertains strictly to international fields. In his discussion of internationalization in higher education, Teichler (2004) acknowledged that an
international education touches all aspects of instruction, policy and administration to some extent. He argued that border-crossing communication and border-crossing reputation are practically synonymous with “quality” in academia.

It is not only in academia that study abroad is equated with quality. It has been a long-held belief that employers in the U.S. value study abroad and the skills and knowledge gained by it. Trooboff et al. (2007) confronted the notion that while CEOs and other high-ranking managers may value study abroad and other international experiences, human resource managers and those who make the actual hiring decisions may not. Their report found the opposite to be true. The interesting findings of their study included that managers and human resource representatives find that the longer a study abroad program is the greater value it holds. Additionally, managers and human resource representatives who themselves participated in an international educational experience valued study abroad more than those who had not. This fact is significant because the number of students enrolling in study abroad is continuing to increase and the mindset of hiring “folks like me” will mean that students who have not studied abroad will be at a distinct disadvantage compared to those who did.

With the increased emphasis being placed on the internationalization of education, it is important to examine what this means for leaders in higher education. There is a discrepancy in the value being attributed to internationalized education and the institutional policies and practices in the U.S. (Green, 2002). In his examination of the changing landscape of school leadership, Caldwell (2003) described the importance of
leaders staying current on trends, issues, threats, and opportunities in education at both
the national and international levels. However, data shows that in the U.S., in spite of a
recent poll (Hayward and Siaya, 2001) that indicated that high school students heading to
four-year institutions have an overwhelming interest in international opportunities, less
than 3% of U.S. students study abroad before they graduate (Green, 2002). Educational
leaders need to recognize not only the interest undergraduate students have in
international opportunities but the value these students will gain and give back to the
nation as a result of participation in international education.

According to research by the American Council on Education (ACE), there are
steps that leaders in education can take to make progress in internationalizing the
undergraduate experience. The steps include strong leadership from the top and
throughout the institution (Green, 2002). Strong leadership with an ethos of
internationalization is the key to getting widespread university support necessary for
obtaining the resources and commitment necessary to meet student needs of
internationalized education.

Diversity Among Study Abroad Participants

Since the importance of internationalizing education and the merits of study
abroad have been so widely documented, it is important to verify equal access across
various student populations to international study. Gary Rhodes, director of the Center for
Global Education, stated, “It is critical that students who study abroad mirror all the
students who study at U.S. colleges and universities. Those in the field are convinced it makes a significant impact on understanding the world and having a better career” (as cited in Dessoff, 2006, p. 22). An IES Think Tank Report (IES Abroad, 2009) reinforced Rhodes’ comments on the merits of study abroad and examined the lack of diversity found in study abroad participants. While the study recognized how a narrow portion of U.S. college students are participating in international study, the focus was on the racial, gender, and socioeconomic disparities among the students who did and did not study abroad. No mention is made about the possible absence of LGBT students in study abroad programs. The importance of increasing all forms of diversity among study abroad participants should not be dismissed, but the exclusion of LGBT students from this study is troubling as it is representative of many other studies on diversity in study abroad participants that excludes issues of sexual minorities.

Though sexual minorities are frequently excluded from examinations of diversity in international study, one can find parallels in the types of diversity discussed and what LGBT students might experience. For example, Salisbury et al. (2008) also described the lack of diversity among study abroad participants in their examination of the factors affecting students’ decisions to study abroad. Again, sexual orientation is absent from the discussion. However, the authors did make an interesting comment regarding the cultural accessibility of a study abroad program. They argued that attitudes and values learned at their home school will affect the cultural accessibility – the ease with which a student will be able to adjust to the differences between their native culture and their host culture
– of a particular study abroad program. This is highly applicable to LGBT students considering study abroad whether they are going from a more accepting society to a less accepting one or vice versa. The attitudes they face at home regarding their sexual identity will shape their perceptions of how their identity will be received abroad.

Another way to gauge the concerns LGBT students might have about pursuing study abroad is to examine the experiences of other minority groups. Talburt and Stewart (1999) used a case study of an African American student on a study abroad program in Spain to discuss gender and race issues in study abroad. At the time, the authors found very few studies on race and gender issues pertaining to study abroad and expressed concern on how the needs of students whose race or gender might negatively impact their potential to meet their study abroad goals were being neglected. Talburt and Stewart went so far as to intimate that the lack of inclusion of issues of race in study abroad indicates racism on the part of authors who are omitting these issues. A possible connection could be made between the lack of literature on LGBT students and study abroad as an indication of the heteronormativity inherent in higher education.

Heteronormativity in Higher Education

The importance of fighting this heteronormativity relates to the importance of this study. By not examining the issues and concerns of LGBT students in higher education, educational leaders are forcing these students to attempt to meet their educational goals without the assistance on which non-LGBT students can rely. Asher’s (2007) experiences as a teacher educator illustrated how even when trying to promote multiculturalism in
education homophobia and heterosexism run rampant. She argued that multicultural education has generally focused on race and culture and has paid little attention to issues of sexuality, reinforcing the heteronormativity in education. Additionally, she pointed out that homophobic slurs often go unchecked in hallways and classrooms. Educators permitting such behavior can be viewed as promoting homophobia and contributes to LGBT students being wary of confiding in staff that may ostracize them. This leads directly to LGBT students not pursuing the resources they require, whether related to study abroad, degree completion, or any number of issues in higher education.

Oftentimes even when educational leaders step forward to advocate for awareness of sexual minorities their message can be lost in other discussions of diversity. Wallace (2002) cited his own experiences as a gay male professor in higher education as an example of this. Specifically he mentioned instances in which the homophobia and heterosexism on his campus did not manifest itself in the direct way in which they are expected but rather in the form of heteronormativity. The absence of dialogue on issues of sexuality often leads to LGBT students feeling alienated and Othered.

*LGBT Students’ Experiences Abroad*

An examination of cross-cultural gender differences might give some insight to experiences had by LGBT students during study abroad. Jessup-Anger (2008) studied U.S. students on a three-week study program to New Zealand to observe their reactions to the different gender norms. What she found was that the students brought their own embedded assumptions about gender roles into the program and they tended to be
reinforced by the attitudes of those they encountered in New Zealand. The author theorized that too many cultural similarities existed for gender to become salient during the study. Perhaps LGBT students would find this to be the case if they were to study abroad in a region that mirrored the attitudes of their hometown and campus, which could be more comforting than experiencing a culture vastly different than their own but would not instill in them the cultural competency that can come along with feeling of culture shock.

When Jussup-Anger’s (2008) study is compared to Twombly’s (1995) study of female students studying abroad in Costa Rica, one can see how regional differences affect cultural differences. Twombly’s study showed that female students were harassed daily by Costa Rican men in the form of “piropos” or catcalls. This cultural experience could lead to students feeling like they are outsiders in their host culture. Twombly acknowledged that much of the women’s discomfort can be attributed to culture shock but admits that the discomfort of the students was compounded by the fact that those responsible for the program were not fully aware of the seriousness of the gender dynamic. The same principles could be applied to concerns for LGBT students embarking on study abroad and stresses the importance of informing students of all facets of the cultural differences, including attitudes towards gays, lesbians, and transgendered.
Issues for LGBT Students at Home and Abroad

While there is a stark absence of literature on LGBT students participation in study abroad, one can look to literature on the needs and concerns of LGBT students on national campuses and begin to understand the trepidations LGBT students may have regarding studying in a foreign country. Crocco’s (2001) examination of what she argued are misogynistic and homophobic norms in American society asserted that such norms produce aggressively homophobic school climates. She claimed that, as a result, many gay and lesbian students suffer from chronic absenteeism, eating disorders, and are three times more likely to commit suicide than their non-LGBT peers. It can be argued that the heteronormative curriculum pushed in education perpetuates these homophobic norms and makes campuses feel unsafe. Crocco called for amending social science curriculum as a way of educating and reversing homophobic attitudes on campuses. One would imagine that increased education on gay and lesbian issues would increase LGBT students’ access not only to study abroad resources but to a variety of student services as well.

The perception about educational institutions being potentially unsafe for LGBT students is a factor that needs to be considered by study abroad center staff and administrators. In Kumashiro’s (2000) examination of approaches to anti-oppressive education, he stressed the need for schools to be safe and welcoming environments where harassment, verbal or physical, is not tolerated and normalcy is not presumed. When U.S. study abroad centers are forming reciprocal relationships with universities abroad they...
should work to ensure that these attitudes are shared with the host university or at the very least that resources are established at the host university to help LGBT students deal with any adversity they may face as a result of their sexual identity.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the goal of this study is to be inclusive of all sexual minority groups. While the author uses the term ‘LGBT,’ this group also includes students questioning their sexual identity and students with atypical gender behavior or those who do not identify with established gender norms. Dankmeijer (2008) assessed the needs for education about LGBT issues. He stated that in regions where combating heteronormativity is not viewed as essential, i.e. areas where discrimination against gays and lesbians is not prevalent, people with atypical gender behavior’s needs are excluded from the discussion. The author stressed not only the importance of including transgendered people when considering issues of sexual identity but also cautions against interpreting transgender as one single identity saying that it should instead be viewed as a continuum of feelings and identities. Dankmeijer’s comments are important as they emphasize the need for the ‘T’ in LGBT, which, as he stated, are too often disregarded, especially so in preparing college students for study abroad. The comments also serve to broaden the meaning of the ‘T’ in LGBT to be more inclusive.

With a broader definition of the target student population established, it is important to examine the role educational leaders play in the success of LGBT students. Callahan (2001) discussed the importance of the high school counselor in protecting gay and lesbian teens but her research and her positions can be applied to LGBT youth in
higher education as well. The study abroad advisor as well as other campus administrators should be held to the same accountability as the high school guidance counselor as a resource for LGBT youths. University staff faculty and administrators need to be educated about sexual minority groups and encouraged to be advocates for curriculum change that includes contributions by gays and lesbians, and especially to make their offices safe and welcoming environments for students to come for information and assistance. This last point is especially important for study abroad advisors to adopt because if LGBT students do not feel safe approaching a study abroad staff member for information, they may never receive that information and, as has been discussed previously, information can mean the difference between a successful and a potentially dangerous study abroad experience.

Schwarts (1994) reinforced the call for increased staff training and resources to assist LGBT youth. She asserted that LGBT students are the most discriminated against and the most overlooked in the educational system. This discrimination not only hurts LGBT students but societal perceptions of gender roles as well as young men and women afraid of being accused of being gay or lesbian will exist in very narrow gender confines not wanting to appear too masculine or feminine.

Confining ideas of what is gender appropriate can lead to further gender identity issues. In their book, *Our Place on Campus: LGBT Services and Programs in Higher Education*, Sanlo et al. (2002) discussed the difficulty in knowing how many LGBT students may exist on campus. They cited the reticence of many in the LGBT community
to disclose their non-heterosexual identity and the lack of campus inquiry as the primary reason this data is unavailable. In both cases the authors indicated that terminology is the problematic element. The few schools that do include sexual orientation in their data surveys might include labeling that a student does not feel applies to their sexual identity and thus not respond. The authors hypothesized “that traditional labeling may inhibit some LGBT students from self-identification” (p. 34). The impact of this is that if the presence of LGBT students on campus cannot be accurately documented, campuses cannot guarantee that LGBT students are receiving the services they need. This is applicable specifically to study abroad services as well.

The difficulty in obtaining statistical data on LGBT students is vital to the difficulty in answering the writer’s research question regarding LGBT student participation in study abroad. While Gonyea and Moore (2007) studied LGBT students’ participation in educationally purposeful activities, study abroad is lumped together with internships, independent study, and community service among other activities held on the student’s home university campus. Despite the fact that their findings illustrated that LGBT students are more likely to participate in these activities, they gave no indication of the results specific to study abroad. LGBT students could feel much more comfortable participating in extracurricular activities on their home campus than they would feel in another country. This information could be misleading as the risk of discrimination or physical harm could be much less prevalent on a home campus than an international host campus depending on where each institution is located, and, thus, participating in an
educational experience on campus has the potential to be less threatening and more accessible than participating in an international experience.

While not much literature exists on U.S. LGBT student attitudes toward study abroad, Kato’s (1998) article on working with LGBT international students studying in the U.S. can shed some light on the concerns of this student populace leaving their home country. Kato’s research has shown international LGBT students have difficulty finding support services and that the silence by many university support staff on issues of sexuality is based on fear of causing controversy. University staff silence makes LGBT students uncertain of to whom they can safely divulge their identity, which may cause them to miss out on essential resources on navigating higher education and, specifically, safely and successfully participating in international study.

Kato’s (1998) study is also beneficial in that it described what LGBT students from the U.S. could potentially expect in various regions. Kato quoted many international students from Africa, Southeast Asia, and even parts of Western Europe who report fears of returning to their home country. These students’ fears ranged from having to go back into the closet, facing rejection from their families if they divulge their sexual identity and even fears of physical violence. These attitudes could show U.S. LGBT students that they should have concerns for their ability to safely study in those regions. Kato stressed the importance of the ability of LGBT students to be able to freely disclose their identity as it brings about an immense sense of personal freedom and greater integration into
one’s environment. By this measure, LGBT students who feel free to be open with their sexuality will gain a greater immersion into their host culture during study abroad.

Katz (2008) emphasized how different regions of the U.S. have varying levels of acceptance of the LGBT population. This same truth can be applied to other countries in the world and should be brought to the attention of domestic LGBT students considering study abroad. For example, Spain overall has very progressive attitudes and has very pro-LGBT legislation but a student will have a very different experience studying in Madrid as opposed to that in a smaller town where they would be at risk for discrimination or harassment. It is important for students to acknowledge that a pervasive national attitude does not extend to every corner of a country. It is also vital that this information be made easily available through campus study abroad centers so LGBT students know ahead of time what environment they are entering.

The importance of easily accessible information for LGBT students studying abroad cannot be overstated. Rubin (2000) through a series of interviews with gay and lesbian students who have studied abroad and with study abroad advisors, reinforced how crucial information for LGBT students studying abroad is. She interviewed one gay male student from San Francisco State University who studied abroad in Spain for a year and did no research on the attitudes in Spanish culture towards gay men and lesbians. This student encountered harassment and threats of violence when he embarked on a relationship with a man he met. Conversely, a gay male student from University of Indiana with whom Rubin spoke studied abroad in Germany and researched the attitude
of the country extensively prior to departure. This student’s experience, maybe due to the
different attitudes of the region and maybe due to his research was much more positive
and free of fear and insecurity. In an interesting twist, the Indiana student claimed to have
felt much more comfortable and secure in his sexuality in Germany than in his rural town
in the U.S. For this particular student, the region in which he chose to study abroad and
his research of that region facilitated a safer and more liberating experience than he could
have in the U.S.

Rubin’s (2000) inclusion, finally, of a conversation with a study abroad advisor in
Alabama who will advise LGBT students if they approach him but does not advertise his
services or display any resources for LGBT students because other students “might be put
off by it” emphasized the need for information for LGBT students to be easily accessible
without a student needing to out themselves to receive it. By putting the obligation on the
student to come forward, educators run the risk of exposing a student to an unsafe and
unfulfilling experience abroad as well as on their home campus. Resources for LGBT
students interested in study abroad need to be available in a manner in which students
feel comfortable obtaining it.

While many universities nationwide make available information for LGBT
students considering participation in study abroad, NYU stands out with its Student to
Student Guide (New York University, 2008) specifically for LGBT students with
information on all the locations in which they offer programs. The purpose of the guide is
to provide students with an idea of the attitudes and acceptance levels of the specific
cities in which they will potentially be immersing themselves. The guide noted that while most major cities in the world are open-minded and accepting of people of different sexual orientations and gender identities, there are varying levels of acceptance. Student testimonials alerted students to how acceptable public displays of affection are, what the legal rights of the LGBT population are in a particular area, and how to get involved with local LGBT organizations. This guide should be a model for all campus study abroad offices on what information to provide to their LGBT students before studying abroad.

Rationale for the Study

Based on the review of the literature it is clear that little is known about LGBT student participation in international study. While scholars have extolled the benefits of international study (Talburt et al., 1999; Trooboff et al., 2007) and examined the lack of diversity in study abroad participants (IES Abroad, 2009; Salisbury et al., 2008) this examination has not extended to the sexual minority community. Based on the discussed challenges for LGBT students in higher education (Dankmeijer, 2008; Kumashiro, 2000; Sanlo et al., 2002), it stands to reason that these challenges would present a hurdle if these same students wanted to pursue international study. As a result, the writer developed a study in the hopes of gaining insight into the attitudes LGBT students have towards study abroad and the experiences had by sexual minority students who had previously studied abroad.
Summary

The benefits of study abroad are widely documented. Beyond the academic and personal gains to be had, students who have completed study abroad have a competitive edge when entering the job market. Additionally, with U.S. higher education less accessible, affordable, and of less quality than many other countries, it is important we give all students equal opportunity to spend some time at international universities of repute. Arguably most important, however, is the global competency to be gained, which is so vital in our increasingly global society. The success of their students should be the primary focus of educational leaders. More and more, this means internationalizing education to meet the growing need for global citizens.

While research recognizes the lack of diversity among study abroad participants, the focus of said studies has been on a lack of racial, gender, and socioeconomic diversity and not on sexual orientation. Heteronormativity of U.S. higher education contributes to the lack of information on LGBT students’ participation in study abroad by not providing an environment in which said students feel secure in disclosing their identity. Without sufficient knowledge of the numbers of LGBT students on university campuses and LGBT students participating in study abroad, educators and study abroad professionals need to make every effort to make accurate information about various countries, laws, and attitudes towards the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. Without such information, students may opt to not pursue international study, or worse, embark on a study abroad program without sufficient information to ensure their safety.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The following chapter addresses the process of collecting and analyzing data from a study created by the writer. The writer collected the data over the winter and spring of 2010. The purpose of this study was to gain greater insight to the attitudes and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender students towards international study. The study set out to answer three fundamental questions:

1. How much importance do LGBT students place on how their sexual identity will be received by a host culture when deciding whether or not to study abroad?

2. Can LGBT students find information pertinent to sexual minority students undertaking international study easily and without divulging their sexual identity to a university faculty or staff member?

3. What changes can be made on college campuses to make LGBT students more likely to consider study abroad and more prepared for study abroad?

Setting of the Study

The setting of the study was a large public university in northern California. The undergraduate student population during fall 2009 was 24,655. Annually, more than
1,200 students study or work abroad each year. It is difficult to ascertain the number of LGBT students on a university campus because this is a student population who is uncomfortable self-identifying due to fears of discrimination (Sanlo et al., 2002). The campus’s LGBT Resource Center could not give an estimate as to the number of LGBT students on campus or the number of students who utilize their services. Participants for the study were recruited through advertisements and support from the campus Education Abroad Center and the LGBT Resource Center.

Population & Sample

According to Cowan (2007), population is “a group of elements (in this case, people) that are all alike on at least one characteristic, but usually more than one” (p. 113). The population was undergraduate students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender and had either studied abroad or were pursuing study abroad to some degree. Purposeful sampling was used to guarantee information rich participants. According to Schuh and Upcraft (2001), purposive sampling “is used because the goal is to solicit the perceptions of specific groups of people who are well informed about the situation” (p. 43). Thus, individuals for this study who self-identified as LGBT and had either already studied abroad or were considering it were chosen because of the insight they would be able to provide regarding LGBT students’ attitudes toward the accessibility of study abroad.
Design of Study

The essential research questions asked by the writer are important in this period of financial uncertainty in higher education. Programs and resources in higher education are being eliminated daily. It is crucial that the value of the programs in danger of being eliminated is brought to the foreground. Additionally, the drive to continue to advocate for equality and fight discrimination in institutions of higher education must not recede as campuses struggle to remain solvent. That being said, are LGBT students being given the same educational opportunities as non-LGBT students? To attempt to answer this question, the writer designed a survey questionnaire for students to complete online. The benefit of this design is that it affords students the opportunity to participate in the study completely anonymously.

The study was conducted using a qualitative design method. The benefit of a qualitative approach allowed participants to elaborate and answer questions on specific topics. The researcher developed a questionnaire (see Appendix A) using open-ended questions to elicit informative responses made rich by the experiences participants could provide (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). In addition, respondents were asked the same questions and the responses were analyzed to see if themes emerged (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The study consisted of an online survey questionnaire that consisted of two sections: (1) Background information and (2) questions relating to either the students’ experiences or attitudes toward study abroad.
Procedures

The researcher wanted to ensure that participants could submit their responses to the study with complete anonymity. As such, the researcher used the campus’s Education Abroad Center and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Center to advertise the study and direct interested students to the online questionnaire provided by an online survey hosting site. Participants logged onto a website, anonymously self-identified their sexual identities, and confirmed they were undergraduate students who had participated in or were planning on participating in study abroad. Additionally, participants gave their informed consent (see Appendix B) to participate in the study by selecting “I Agree” rather than “I Do Not Agree” to the terms laid out on the first page of the survey. An “I Agree” response was required to continue on to the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a questionnaire administered to participants visiting an online site. The questionnaire was developed based on a literature review on the benefits and challenges of study abroad as well as the challenges facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender students in higher education. The researcher inquired about the experiences of LGBT students who had studied abroad and the concerns of LGBT students who were considering studying abroad. The questionnaire included seven demographic questions. The remainder of the questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and Likert scale-type questions. The researcher field tested the questionnaire on five
undergraduate students and one graduate student and made revisions based on their feedback.

The first seven items consisted of demographic questions that allowed the researcher to differentiate between students who had gone abroad and those who had not. Additionally, the demographic questions gave the participants the opportunity to identify how they most comfortably defined their sexual orientation.

The remainder of the questions focused on the experiences of LGBT students who had studied abroad or the attitudes or concerns of LGBT students who were considering study abroad. For the students who had previously studied abroad, access to resources for LGBT students studying abroad, how prepared they were for their host cultures’ attitudes towards the LGBT population, and what they would improve regarding campus study abroad centers’ preparation of LGBT students heading off for study abroad were explored.

For the students who had not yet studied abroad but were considering it, the questions focused on the concerns students had about study abroad. Additionally, the researcher asked if there were any locations a student would not consider studying for fear of discrimination or hostility.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The writer organized data according to the relevance to the research questions. Grouping related survey questions together, the writer looked for patterns that addressed
the research questions posed. Using reflective analysis to interpret the data and taking into account the expanded replies of the students who participated in the study, the researcher formulated answers to the research questions posited.

Limitations

Foremost among the limitations on the interpretation and application of this data is the small size of respondents to the study. Without a larger amount of data to draw from it is difficult to draw any accurate conclusions about the influence of LGBT students’ sexual identity on their decision to pursue international study. Additionally, the instrumentation of the study did not give the rich information that interviews may have provided but the researcher’s desire to allow students to participate in the study anonymously required the use of the online questionnaire.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Organization

It is important to begin any discussion of study results with the research questions being asked by the writer. Are LGBT students being given the same opportunities to study abroad as their non-LGBT peers? Are LGBT students being given sufficient access to information and resources? What improvements can be made on university campuses to help facilitate greater participation by LGBT students in study abroad? These questions are vital not just for the study but also because of the broader importance of ensuring equal access to educational opportunities for all students.

The data is organized by research question. Qualitative data was taken via an online survey questionnaire completed by LGBT students at a large public university in northern California who had either already participated in a study abroad program or were planning on participating in study abroad in the future. The survey questionnaire was collected over the winter and spring of 2010. Emails from the campus Education Abroad Center and LGBT Resource Center were sent to their respective listservs and directed interested students to a link to the survey.
Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

Research Question #1: How much importance do LGBT students place on how their sexual identity will be received by a host culture when deciding whether or not to study abroad?

The writer’s first research question deals with how much a student’s sexual identity influences the decision to study abroad. The survey questionnaire asked this of both students who had already studied abroad and students who were planning on studying abroad. Upon inspection of Table 1, it is overwhelmingly clear that among the students who already completed a study abroad program, their sexual identity did not play a role in their decision to pursue international study. It is true across identities as the responses of students who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (no students identified as transgender in the study) clearly indicated that their sexual identity did not play a role in their decision to study abroad. Of the students who identified as lesbian, 100% of the respondents claimed that their sexual identity did not influence their decision to study abroad. Among the students who identified as gay, 90% reported that their sexual identity did not affect their decision. Lastly, of the students that identified as bisexual, 80% claimed that their sexual identity was not a factor. This data confirms that among respondents to the questionnaire, sexual identity was not a factor in their decision to study abroad.

Students who opted to explain their responses stated that wanting to study abroad because it related to their field of study, because they wanted to travel to a specific
region, or to travel for personal reasons was more instrumental in their decision to participate in international study. One student, who identified as gay, stated:

Initially I was a little hesitant about being gay in China. I wasn't sure exactly how open the Chinese, and more specifically the Shanghainese people were to gay lifestyles. However after doing some research, I learned that there is a growing (even large) gay community in Shanghai specifically. I already knew that compared to the rest of China, Shanghai was a very cosmopolitan and forward city, but I had no ideathat the gay lifestyle would be so accepted (at least in terms of nightlife).

The statement mirrored other comments by students who chose to study abroad, which support the data in suggesting that among students who have a drive to study abroad, their sexual identity is not a factor.

Table 1

LGBT students’ responses to whether their sexual identity affected their decision to study abroad (n = 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 details the responses of students who had not yet studied abroad but were in some phase of planning for it. Examination of this table shows more variation than Table 1. Because fewer students who identified as lesbian and gay responded to this question it is difficult to gauge a pattern. The one lesbian who responded said her sexual identity would have an impact on whether or not she studied abroad and slightly more gay men said the same. This could represent the level of attrition of students who want to study abroad but did not actually participate in an international study program.

The vast majority of students (88.9%) who identified as bisexual said their sexual identity was not a factor in whether or not they would study abroad. These students’ expanded replies reflect a readiness to hide their sexual identity should it become an issue. One bisexual student stated, “I feel that if I wanted to hide my sexual identity for safety reasons I would be able to do so and still participate in a study abroad program.” While this attitude might provide the student or students with more confidence to embark upon a study abroad program, it could prevent said student from full immersion in the host culture, thus preventing them from experiencing the full benefit of a study abroad program as discussed in the literature review. Another student claimed, “I am aware of the cultural situations in the places I am traveling to and feel fairly comfortable dealing with each foreign country accordingly.” This statement suggests that while the student’s sexual identity may be a factor it is a surmountable one with the appropriate resources and information.
Table 2

LGBT students’ response to whether their sexual identity would affect their decision to study abroad (n = 24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question #2: Can LGBT students find information pertinent to sexual minority students undertaking international study easily and without divulging their sexual identity to a university faculty or staff member?

The second research question dealt with whether or not LGBT students are being given sufficient access to resources regarding study abroad and the level of difficulty the students faced in trying to find resources. This question is vital as the above literature has shown that access to information is a big determinant in whether a student will feel comfortable in a host culture and not only pursue study abroad but fully benefit from it. Additionally, by knowing before departing for a foreign country what the general attitude toward sexual minorities is there, a student can know what manner to behave in to feel safe and secure.
Table 3 outlines the way student respondents ranked the quality and quantity of resources they received prior to departing for their study abroad program on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being very unsatisfactory and 5 being very satisfactory. The results were very mixed. Of the two lesbian students who responded, one ranked the resources as being very unsatisfactory (ranked 1 out of 5) and the other ranked the resources as satisfactory (4 out of 5). Due to this low number of responses and without any expanded replies, this information is inconclusive.

Of the gay students who responded, 50% ranked the resources they received as very unsatisfactory. This number is alarmingly low until one takes into consideration how these students elaborated on their rankings. The general attitude was one of ambivalence. One student wrote, “I don’t think there were any specific resources but I didn’t expect any.” Another student stated, “I never heard of any LGBT resources that I could take advantage of on the Shanghai Program.”

The bisexual students’ responses were quite mixed with the distribution ranging from 40% ranking the available resources as very unsatisfactory, 40% as average, and 20% as satisfactory. The one bisexual student who further explained his/her answer stated, “I received the same amount as every other student.” This could be taken to mean that the overall resources available to students, LGBT or not, are equal, whether satisfactory or not. Regardless, the feedback from the bisexual students proved inconclusive.
One could take this to mean that whether or not resources were available the students did not seek them out. Regardless, it indicates that what resources there are need to be more visible and openly discussed in pre-departure orientation meetings in order to be effective. This would ensure that LGBT students are at least aware of their existence and know how to obtain information without divulging their sexual identity to a university staff or faculty member.

Table 3

LGBT students’ assessment of resources provided prior to participation in study abroad (n = 16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Satisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the above information is combined with the data displayed in Table 4, which records whether students felt they knew how their sexual identity would be
received by their host culture, the results contradict the literature and the emphasis placed on the importance of adequate information for LGBT students prior to departure for a study abroad program. Of the students who identified as lesbian, 50% felt they knew how their sexual identity would be received. Additionally, 50% of the students who identified as bisexual felt they knew prior to departure that they knew how their sexual identity would be received. While this data is inconclusive with regard to the students’ opinions of the resources made available to them before the start of their international study, these results do seem to indicate that the lack of information did not prove to be a deterrent for them.

Table 4

LGBT students’ response to whether they knew how their sexual identity would be received abroad (n = 16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the students who identified as gay, 70% said they felt they knew how their sexual identity would be received. What makes this difference in opinion from the lesbian and bisexual students notable are the explained responses the students submitted. One
gay student stated, “I did a lot of research before leaving.” Another student wrote, “I had a lot of information about Buenos Aires and felt like if I were going there I’d (sic) be ready but didn’t really know much about Mendoza which isn’t (sic) as big of a city and might not have been as progressive.” These students and other gay students who responded indicated they did some level of research prior to leaving which contradicts the earlier statements made when asked about the quality of resources available to LGBT students. This contradiction indicates that students who were displeased with the resources available may not have sought out any resources while students who were satisfied with the resources actually took the initiative to find them.

The students who had not yet been on a study abroad program gave higher rankings to the resources available. The one lesbian respondent to this question ranked the resources as satisfactory. Additionally, 33% of the bisexual students ranked the resources as average. The more detailed replies of the students reflect the same ambivalence displayed by the students who have already studied abroad. One bisexual student stated, “I haven’t really used any resources” while another wrote, “I’m not sure. I have never really used any resources before.” These statements indicate that the problem may not lie in insufficient resources or hard to find resources but instead in lack of student initiative to find said resources.
Table 5

LGBT students’ who have not studied abroad assessment of resources provided (n = 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Satisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Question #3:* What changes can be made on college campuses to make LGBT students more likely to consider study abroad and more prepared for study abroad?

The last research question dealt with the improvements that could be made on university campuses to facilitate greater participation of LGBT students in study abroad programs. As the study has shown, there may not even be an issue of undergraduate LGBT students being hesitant to study abroad. The results of this study show that for most of the student respondents, their sexual identity is not a factor in their decision to study abroad. The study does show, however, that whatever the resources available, the
students are either not aware of them or are indifferent to them. This indicates that more
direct discussion about the resources available to LGBT students would be beneficial.

Table 6 shows student responses when asked what changes could be made on
their campus to better prepare sexual minority students for study abroad. This question
was posed to both students who had already studied abroad and those who had not. The
recommendations were quite varied. Twenty-one percent of students surveyed thought
their campus sufficiently prepared LGBT students for study abroad and recommended no
changes. Another 21% recommended easier access to study abroad advisors. Twenty-five
percent of students recommended easier access to information. Thirteen percent of
students recommended easier access to academic advisors. The range and distribution of
responses suggests that while the student respondents felt that there is need for
improvement in the delivery of information for LGBT students pursuing international
study, how this information should be delivered is inconclusive.
Table 6
LGBT students’ recommended changes for how to better prepare LGBT students for study abroad (n = 52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Changes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier Access to Academic Advisors</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier Access to Study Abroad Advisors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier Access to Information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When students specified the kind of information they wish campuses provided, they indicated a desire for comprehensive preparedness that did not require hiding one’s identity. One student stated:

I realize there is a level of cultural relativism that needs to be observed when studying abroad. However, the larger message that I felt was being conveyed was to simply keep your sexual identity to yourself. I do not agree with this approach, and hope that other study abroad programs will develop new ways of creating a
safe learning environment for all students without asking other students to stifle their identity for the "cultural" comfort of others.

Among the students who had already studied abroad, the sentiment was very similar. Students expressed that there had been some information but nothing to which the students were explicitly directed. One gay student stated, “These resources should be available wherever possible, as soon as possible, and perhaps be made evident to the entire student body.” This sentiment touches on the literature (Rubin, 2000) that discussed the importance of making resources available despite the discomfort it might cause others.

Discussion

Three essential research questions require answers in terms of the results of the data. How much importance do LGBT students place on how their sexual identity will be received by a host culture when deciding whether or not to study abroad? How difficult is it for LGBT students to receive information pertinent to sexual minority students undertaking international study? What changes can be made on college campuses to make LGBT students more likely to consider study abroad and more prepared for study abroad?

According to the data, LGBT students do not base their decision to study abroad on their sexual identity. While LGBT students who have returned from a study abroad program by and large stated that their sexual identity was not a factor in their decision to
study abroad, the study showed that LGBT students who had not yet studied abroad did feel their sexuality was a factor. The student respondents who felt this way may not end up participating in international study due to these concerns. While the returning students’ responses do not support the original assumption that fear of discrimination dissuades LGBT students from studying abroad, the responses of LGBT students who had not yet gone abroad indicate that this fear of discrimination does exist. Further research is required to determine how frequently LGBT students decline to participate in international study as a result of the fear.

The study also shows that LGBT students are not receiving sufficient resources in preparation for study abroad. The reasons for this, however, are inconclusive. While many of the student respondents ranked the quantity and quality of resources available poor, they then admitted that they had not sought out resources in the first place. This further indicates that the students’ sexual identity did not play a major role in their decision to study abroad. The LGBT students who had already participated in a study abroad program indicated they did not receive satisfactory resources nor did they feel confident they knew how sexual minorities were received in their host culture but that did not serve as a deterrent to international study. The results support the research that calls for increased accessibility of what information is available to sexual minority students interested in study abroad (Rubin, 2000). If the information that does exist was more widely disseminated, these students would be able to access it without divulging their sexual identity.
While the results of the study indicated ambivalence on the part of the students toward the resources available, many respondents suggested changes for how campuses facilitate greater participation by LGBT students in study abroad. The overwhelming response was to simply make the resources better known. A link on a website is helpful but university campuses cannot be uncomfortable discussing the needs of their LGBT students. Students indicated that by making information difficult to come by or by simply advising students to disguise their sexual identity, campuses appear to be prioritizing the comfort of those who would be “put off” by the discussion of sexual minorities over the needs of the LGBT student population. Incorporating information specific to LGBT students into general orientation meetings or pre-departure literature would provide these sexual minority students with the information they need and help make them feel acknowledged by university staff and faculty.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A review of the literature exposed a lack of data on the presence of LGBT students among study abroad participants. This study utilized online questionnaires to gather qualitative data concerning the experiences and attitudes of LGBT students and study abroad. Students who identified as belonging to a sexual minority elaborated on their personal experiences participating in international education or their attitudes toward considering whether or not to participate. Students also discussed the quality and quantity of resources available and what changes university campuses could make to facilitate increased participation in study abroad by LGBT students. Data collected was used to draw inferences about whether or not LGBT students base their decision to study abroad on their sexual identity and fears of discrimination and whether a lack of resources prevents LGBT students from feeling comfortable immersing in a foreign culture.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that leaders in education do not fully recognize the importance of an internationalized education. The internationalization of education had been called the next evolution of education and compared in importance to the
development of the land-grant university system and the GI Bill (Salisbury et al., 2008). Of primary importance, then, to educational leadership is to advocate for further research and additional resources to continue to push for an internationalized curriculum. While it can be difficult to justify requests for resources, particularly in economic times as restricting as these, the internationalization of the education of U.S. students will prove to be a solid investment.

Arguably the most important component of international education is the experience of study abroad. This direct and experiential educational opportunity has proven extremely beneficial to undergraduate students but less than 3% of U.S. students participate in international study prior to graduation (Green, 2002). With this in mind, it should be a priority of educational leaders to develop study abroad programs that target many different degree programs and that do not interfere with progress to graduation. Additionally, faculty should be involved with designing and teaching these programs as their input and participation ensures a diverse selection of program opportunities. Faculty participation could also increase the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration, both within the university and among the host institutions where the international study is taking place.

The opportunity to participate in study abroad must be available to all students. As such, it is important that study abroad opportunities be made to accommodate nontraditional students (NAFSA, 2003), including sexual minority students. The lack of conclusive literature neither confirms nor denies the assumption that LGBT students’
sexual identity poses a barrier to study abroad. The writer’s study, however, indicated that increased availability of information catering specifically to LGBT students interested in international study could make students feel more prepared and more confident about embarking on study abroad. It is arguable that the elusiveness of this information is due to pervasive heteronormativity in institutions of higher education (Asher, 2007; Crocco, 2002). By acknowledging and challenging this heteronormativity, educational leaders are in a position to fundamentally change the environment of higher education and improve the chances of success for sexual minority students by helping to ensure that these students have access to educational opportunities equal to their peers.

Recommendations

As the review of the literature illustrated, the subject of sexual minority student participation in international study is one that has been insufficiently explored. While numerous studies explore the absence of diversity in study abroad (IES, 2009; Salisbury et al., 2008), these studies focused on racial, gender, and socioeconomic diversity and made no mention of sexual minority groups. The primary recommendation for further research is for scholars to develop a study to find a way to accurately and sensitively collect data on the sexual minority student population. Without this data it is impossible to assess the efficacy of any student services for LGBT students in higher education, let alone study abroad services. This information would address whether or not LGBT students’ needs are being adequately met in institutions of higher education.
With the above mentioned data, institutions would be able to conduct quantitative studies to determine the actual numbers of LGBT students who participate in international study and use that number in comparison to overall numbers of sexual minority students to determine if LGBT students are participating in study abroad at lower rates than their non-LGBT peers. While this study sought to explore the experience and attitudes of LGBT students, it provided insufficient data to determine if an issue of equal access to study abroad for students of different sexual orientations exists.

Should there prove to be a discrepancy in the participation rates of LGBT and non-LGBT students in international study, further research could be undertaken to develop study abroad programs specifically catering to sexual minority groups. The Tlahuica Center for Language and Cultural Exchange in Cuernavaca, Mexico could be a model for such programs. This organization offers study abroad programs with curriculum, cultural immersion, and homestay opportunities specifically geared towards LGBT students in gay-and-lesbian communities (Tallman, 2000).

Additionally, and pertaining specifically to LGBT participation in study abroad, faculty and staff affiliated with campus study abroad centers need to be proactive in informing students of the resources available. Universities that do not already have informational materials that relate to their specific program need to develop them. While a student can benefit from reading the experiences of a LGBT student from NYU’s experience studying abroad in Spain it would be more useful to have information pertaining to the specific program to which they are applying.
Lastly, this writer recommends that campuses fortunate enough to have a resource center for LGBT students utilize them by forming partnerships between that office and any other student service that works with LGBT students. If campus study abroad centers worked closely with LGBT resource centers, the students would have a resource that could direct them to the vast amount of information that exists for sexual minority students interested in international study.

Higher education is facing many, some dire, challenges. It is the responsibility of educational leaders to have the fortitude to fight for programs and resources that ensure student success. While some educators might view international study as a luxury in the current educational climate, this writer argues that its vitality is as important as ever, if not more so. Through international study, students can experience the potential to which institutions of higher education can aspire. It is important that all students are given equal access to this opportunity.
APPENDIX A

Attitudes of LGBT undergraduate students toward study abroad survey

Background Questions
1. Do you identify yourself as:
   a. Lesbian
   b. Gay
   c. Heterosexual
   d. Bisexual
   e. Transgender
   f. Questioning
   g. Other (Please indicate how you most comfortably identify your sexual orientation.)
2. Please rate how open you are regarding your sexual identity on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not open at all and 5 being very open.
3. Please indicate if the following are aware of your sexual identity:
   • Family
   • Close friends
   • Casual Acquaintances
   • Colleagues/Coworkers
   • University Faculty/Staff (professors, advisors, etc.)
4. Please indicate how comfortable you would feel divulging your sexual identity to the following, using a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not at all comfortable and 5 being extremely comfortable:
   • A Professor
   • An Academic Advisor
5. Please indicate if you use the following resources on campus:
   • Professor/TA Office Hours
   • Your Major Advisors Office Hours
   • The Education Abroad Center
   • The LGBT Resource Center
6. Are you currently a University of CA, Davis undergraduate student?
7. What is your class standing?
8. What is your major?
9. Is study abroad directly related to your field of study or the career you wish to pursue?
10. Have you participated in a study abroad program?
11. If you answered ‘No’ to #10, please select your current level of commitment to a study abroad program:
   a. In the process of applying
   b. Planning on applying
   c. Unsure of what program to pursue but definitely planning on study abroad
   d. Interested in study abroad to a specific region but not sure if it is possible
   e. Vaguely interested in study abroad with no specific plans
   f. Other

Research Topic Area
Students who Have Participated in Study Abroad
1. Where did you study abroad? (Country, city, university)
2. For how long did you study abroad?
3. Did concerns over how your sexual orientation would be received influence your decision to study abroad?
4. Please rate how open you were with your sexual identity during study abroad on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being very.
5. Did you engage in a romantic or sexual relationship while on your study abroad program? If so, please describe how open you were in public with your relationship and whether or not you felt safe.
6. Please rate the quantity and quality of the resources you received as an LGBT student going on study abroad on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being very unsatisfactory and 5 being very satisfactory.
7. Do you feel that you knew what your host country/city’s attitude was towards your sexual orientation prior to leaving? Please explain.
8. What would you recommend your campus change regarding preparing LGBT students for study abroad?

Students who Have NOT Participated in Study Abroad
1. What are your reasons for wanting to study abroad?
2. What obstacles do you think might prevent you from being able to study abroad?
3. Do you feel that your sexual orientation is a factor in whether or not you will study abroad? If so, why?
4. Do you feel that your sexual orientation is a factor in where you would choose to study abroad? If so, why?
5. If you answered ‘yes’ to Question 4, where would you absolutely not study abroad?
6. Please rate your access to resources for LGBT students applying for study abroad on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being very unsatisfactory and 5 being very satisfactory.
7. Do feel you need to disclose your sexual identity to receive adequate resources?
8. What would you change about how your campus provides information for LGBT students studying abroad?
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate

You are being asked to participate in research, which will be conducted by Katy Pattison, a student in Education at California State University, Sacramento. The study will investigate whether or not Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) students participate in study abroad less than their non-LGBT peers. The purpose of this study is to ensure equity in access to international education and confirm that LGBT students are receiving the resources they need to participate in an enriching and safe study abroad experience.

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire about your academic goals, your study abroad experiences or your concerns about international study if you are applying to or considering applying to a study abroad program. The questionnaire may require up to thirty minutes of your time. You will be able to submit the questionnaire anonymously. Some of the items in the questionnaire may seem personal, but you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

You may find the questionnaire helpful or informative if you are planning on studying abroad in the future, or you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the results of the study will improve access to resources for LGBT students interested in study abroad and improve the experiences of LGBT students who study abroad in the future.

You will be able complete and submit the questionnaire without divulging any identifying information. This study is completely anonymous. By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research. Your responses will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology used.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Katy Pattison at (530) 219-9144 or by kcpattison@ucdavis.edu.
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.

By selecting ‘I Agree’ you acknowledge your informed consent of participation in this study.
I Agree
I Do Not Agree
REFERENCES


Rubin, A. M. (2000). Some study-abroad programs start to consider needs of gay students: They need warnings about some countries, and may face difficult transitions returning from others. *NAFSA: Rainbow SIG, 4*(2).


