Coming to Canada to study factors that influence students decisions to participate in international exchange

Jennifer Massey, Baylor University
Jeff Burrow, University of Toronto

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jennifer_massey/4/
Increasing numbers of students are participating in study abroad programs. Outcomes associated with these programs have been studied extensively, but relatively little is known about what motivates and influences students to participate. This study investigated factors that motivate and influence students to study on exchange and explored how these factors vary by social identity. The findings support the development of programs, services, and marketing that meet students’ needs.

For many university students, the opportunity to study in a different country and culture is an exciting and potentially transformative learning experience (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, &
Coming to Canada to Study

Hubbard, 2006). Dwyer (2004) argued studying abroad “is usually a defining moment in a young person’s life and continues to impact the participant’s life for years after the experience” (p. 1). Indeed, study abroad holds considerable potential in creating a unique environment for student learning and development (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Moreover, empirical studies have shown these learning environments create the conditions for academic and second language (Coleman, 1998; Collentine & Freed, 2004; Hadis, 2005), personal (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004), and interpersonal development (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; Sutton & Rubin, 2004).

The outcomes associated with international study have become increasingly important since the late 1970s and the rise of contemporary processes of globalization. The impact of time-space compression (Harvey, 1989) resulted in an interconnectedness of regions around the world. As such, university graduates in the post-industrial North American economy and society need to have strong intercultural skills and competencies in order to confront problems that involve diverse perspectives (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Providing opportunities for students to gain intercultural skills is becoming a pressing educational priority, and study abroad and international exchange programs are widely viewed as a unique and effective opportunity for development of these outcomes (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009).

Although the phrases study abroad and exchange programs often are used interchangeably, they differ operationally and philosophically. Barnick (2006) defined student exchange as “a period of study for one semester or a year, through a prearranged bilateral [or consortia] agreement between their home university and the university where [the students] plan to study” (p. 3). A study abroad program is defined “as any academic student program conducted outside the [home country] that is arranged by or conducted through an institutional entity such as a university or nonprofit organization,” (Ho, 2009, p. 1). Study abroad programs can be unilateral, and may not involve the reciprocal movement of students. Unilateral programs are typically arranged on a cost-recovery basis, resulting in significantly higher costs to the student, in some cases more than five times the amount of tuition paid to their home institution.

The significance of the fee difference should not be underestimated, as the costs associated with many study abroad programs prohibit economically marginalized students from participating in this educational opportunity (Association of Universities and College of Canada [AUCC], 2007; Kinsella, Bossers, & Ferreira, 2008; Marcum, 2001). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often view study abroad as superfluous, not relevant to career goals, and beyond their economic reach in terms of program cost and lost income at home (Obst, Bhandari, & Witherell, 2007). There is, therefore, an inherent class-based bias in participation in study abroad programs. Although the economic realities of any study away from home remain, the substantially lower costs of exchange programs have the potential to be more inclusive, attracting a broader range of students interested in studying internationally, particularly for those from less advantaged backgrounds.
Nevertheless, participation in study abroad and exchanges has grown consistently in Canada, the United States, and Europe since 2000 (AUCC, 2007; Bhandari & Chow, 2009; European Union, 2008). It has been estimated that 3% of Canadian university students may study abroad during their undergraduate programs (Bond et al., 2009). Canadian universities view exchanges and study abroad programs as mechanisms for developing “global citizens,” strengthening international understanding, providing intercultural learning opportunities and increasing job skills and the employability of their students (AUCC, 2007). For institutions, enhancing and developing the number of opportunities for international study is considered an important and even necessary initiative. To accomplish this, more information about the motivation and influencing factors which lead students to study on exchange is required.

This study adds to the literature in the field of study abroad in three important ways. The factors that motivate and influence students to study on exchange, a major gap in current research (Council on International Educational Exchange [CIEE], 2006) were investigated. Second, the study was designed to examine motivation and influences to go on exchange from a social identity perspective. Finally, the study focused on incoming students, whereas the vast majority of studies on study abroad/exchange students have focused solely on outgoing students. The combination of these three factors presents a unique perspective on a student population and constructs that have received very little focus in published research to date. Understanding students’ motivations and factors that influence their decisions will help study abroad professionals develop and market programs to students. This should facilitate an increasing number and diversity of students participating in international study. In this study, a medium-sized, publically funded, research intensive university in Ontario, Canada was selected as an illustrative case study to explore the motivation and influencing factors to participate in an exchange abroad from the incoming student perspective.

**Literature Review**

**Intent to Study Abroad**

Published literature on all forms of international education programs has grown considerably over the past four decades (Comp, Gladding, Rhodes, Stephenson, & Vande Berg, 2007). Numerous studies, using data collected from large-scale surveys in the United States, examined intent to study aboard; but empirical research into what motivates students to go abroad is very limited (CIEE, 2006). Study abroad intent has been directly correlated with financial, human, social, and cultural capital (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009). Women, those with a greater interest in understanding different cultures, and students enrolled in a liberal arts institution have a stronger intent to study abroad (Stroud, 2009). Further analysis of factors that influence intent to study abroad identified differences based upon gender and ethnicity. For example, Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella, (2010) found women students were influenced by authority figures, whereas merging personal values, experiences, and peer
influences shaped men. White students were influenced by interest in cross-cultural experiences, whereas for minority students participation in extracurricular activities had a greater impact (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011). These studies were based on large data sets and employed advanced statistical techniques, but they focused on the differences and factors that influence intent to study abroad, not participation in the program. It is unclear how effective these measures are at predicting actual participation, given that many more first-year students report intent to study abroad than subsequently proceed (Bond et al., 2009). To better understand factors that motivate and influence participation, researchers need to shift their attention to students who engage in a study abroad or exchange programs.

**Motivation to Study Abroad**

The limited research examining motivation has focused almost entirely on study abroad, not student exchange, programs. These studies identified a desire for a cross-cultural experience (Brewer, 1983; Carlson et al., 1990; Krzaklewska, 2008; Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006), motivation for academic and/or foreign language development (Caudrey, Petersen, & Shaw, 2008; Ho, 2009; Van Der Meid, 2003), and career motivation (Brewer, 2004) as the principal reasons that motivate students to participate in a study abroad program. The limitations with the methodology and analysis adopted in these studies restrict the reliability of the findings. Some studies that identified cross-cultural experience as the most significant motivator (Brewer, 1983; Krzaklewska, 2008) relied on descriptive statistics and single items, rather than factors, in their analysis. Although Sánchez et al. (2006) used factor analysis, their survey did not include the destination of the students, only their country of origin, thus no conclusions about how program location affects motivation can be made. The different methods of measurement used in each of these studies renders comparisons between them very difficult, especially as limited data regarding the social identity of the participants was presented.

Studies focused on academic motivation found improving a foreign language was a strong motivating factor (Caudrey et al., 2008), but this motivation varied depending on the country in which the student was studying (Brewer, 1983) and the program in which they were enrolled (Sánchez et al., 2006). In situations where the study abroad program was not conducted in English or where the foreign language was not commonly used (such as Chinese), academic motivation was considerably lower. This is particularly common in business and commerce programs where, regardless of the language of the host country, study abroad students typically receive instruction in English (Sánchez et al., 2006). Van Der Meid’s (2004) work on Asian American study abroad students found that, although improving second language skills was somewhat of an important motivator, general academic motivations (taking courses in the major, minor, or elective subjects) were the second lowest rated items. Their findings support the notion that considerable variance exists within a given population of study abroad or exchange students in terms of their motivation; but without a comparison of the various social identities of participants within a population, the relative strengths of these motivations cannot be fully understood.
Coming to Canada to Study

The final theme in the literature on motivation to study abroad examined career development. This motivation has varied considerably among the studies that have included it as an item. Brewer (1983) discovered it to be widely cited among all participants, whereas Caudrey et al. (2008) reported that it was relatively unimportant in their study of European Erasmus students. Among American students, career motivation ranked lower than foreign language acquisition or cultural experience (Carlson et al., 1990). Sánchez et al. (2006) found variance in the importance of this factor, wherein both American and French students were strongly interested in studying abroad as a means to career advancement, but students from China were not. An important question remains therefore: how can we understand or make meaning of these differences? Except for Sanchez et al. (2006), a consideration or analysis of the variance of these items by social identity factors or program of study has not been conducted, and that particular study included only students in commerce programs.

In addition to examining motivations to study abroad, scholars also have sought to understand the factors that influence students to participate and how they select their destination. Previous work found students choose their study abroad destination based on the location of the program, the ability to have fun, and the opportunity to experience a new culture (Anderson, 2007; Caudrey et al., 2008). Chieffo (2000) found outbound study abroad participants received most of their information from friends and classmates but relatively little from faculty within their department. Curiously, this study did not indicate that the home university international or study abroad office was a primary source of information for students. In addition, the study did not mention the influence of online research, which is undoubtedly a prominent factor now. Anderson's (2007) findings largely echo Chieffo's (2000) in that students looked to their friends, university staff, and parents most frequently when deciding to study abroad. Faculty and other family members were far less influential in the decision. No differentiations were made among students who participated in terms of social identity, thus the conclusions are generalized across the sample. Only Caudrey et al. (2008) focused on participants from outside the United States, and the degree to which their findings are relevant for a group of incoming exchange students from around the world is unclear.

Research Questions

Recognizing the gaps in existing research and the heavy reliance on studies involving U.S. students, largely in European study abroad programs, this study is guided by two research questions designed to understand the factors that influence students’ decision to study at one research intensive university in Canada:

1. What are the main influences and sources of information that student seek out to help make their decision?
2. What are the primary motivations of students on exchange?
Methodology

Data Collection and Instrument Design

Surveys were chosen for this study as they are an effective tool for collecting data confidentially from a large number of potential participants. Surveys, particularly online, are the most popular research tool used in study abroad research (Durrant & Dorius, 2007). In this study, all incoming exchange students received an invitation to complete the online ’International Exchange Student Survey’ two weeks after the start of the 2009 academic year or two weeks after the start of the winter term in January 2010. The survey remained open for 2 weeks, and nonrespondents received two reminders to encourage greater participation.

Items designed to understand the primary influences and decision criteria involved in choosing a study abroad destination were influenced by Anderson’s 2007 study. Additional items regarding how students gained awareness of the host institution were developed and included. The next section of the survey investigated students’ motivation to study exchange. This section utilized the 13-item Study Abroad Goal Scale (SAGS), developed by Kitsantas (2004) and used with permission. Modifications were made to reflect that the exchange program was in Canada. Examples of survey items in the SAGS include I participated in a student exchange at [host university] because of a, ”desire to develop my own perspective of Canada” and a ”desire to improve my English or French language skills.” The survey utilized a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 to 5: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Using factor analysis, Kitsantas found three underlying factors in these 13 survey items. They were named cross-cultural, subject interest and competency, and social gathering motivation. The internal consistency of these factors, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha were .82, .80, and .72 respectively. No mean scores for these factors were presented, and the relative strength of each motivation factor among the participants is not known.

Participants

Of the 340 incoming exchange students invited to participate, 187 students (55%) completed the survey. Table 1 highlights the demographic characteristic of respondents in the sample. This sample was compared with the overall population of incoming exchange students using one-sample t tests, and no significant differences in gender, region of origin, program of study and duration of study were found, indicating that the sample was reflective of the population.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using two primary statistical techniques. Chi-square tests were utilized as an inferential statistic to examine the frequency data from the first research question. These tests measure how much the observed cell counts (in two-way tables) vary from the expected cell counts (Field, 2009). Effect sizes were measured using Cramers V, which ranged from 0 to 1 (Field, 2009). Independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used in the second research question.
to understand if motivation differed significantly among various groups of exchange students. These tests were performed using alpha values of .05 to indicate statistical significance. Where significant differences were found, standardized effect sizes (Cohen’s d) are provided. For the purposes of this paper, the ranges of effect sizes are defined as follows: small (.2–.5), medium (.5–.8) and large (above .8); (Cohen, 1988). Differences were tested using four social identity or dependent variables: gender (male or female), region of origin (Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and Europe), duration of exchange program (one term or two terms), and program of study (arts and science or business).

Results

Research Question 1: What are the main influences and sources of information that students seek out to help make their decision?

The first research question investigated where incoming exchange students sought information and whom they consulted for advice in deciding to which host institutions to apply. Of the 10 options, 65% indicated they consulted host institution websites, 52% consulted former
exchange students, 54% visited their home study abroad office, 39% conducted their own research, and 35% utilized the home study abroad website. Conversely, current exchange students, study abroad fairs, and professors were consulted by 15% or less of incoming exchange students. Of the four independent variables, the only significant difference among participants was that female students were more likely, $\chi^2(1, N = 187) = 6.110, p = .013, V = .18$, to consult their home study abroad office than were males. The lack of difference in this section suggests that students consult similar sources for information.

Participants also were asked to indicate where they first heard about their ultimate host exchange destination. For this item, 36% noted they first heard about their host partner from their home study abroad website, 34% from their study abroad office, and 13% from former exchange students. Professors, current exchange students, and the host university website were cited by less than 5% of students each. An examination of this item by gender shows three significant differences. Males heard about exchange programs from former students, $\chi^2(1, N = 187) = 6.078, p = .014, V = .18$, and professors, $\chi^2(1, N = 187) = 5.858, p = .016, V = .18$, more often than did female students. Female students were far more likely to learn from their study abroad office, $\chi^2(1, N = 187) = 5.913, p = .015, V = .18$, than males were. Finally, studies in business were more likely to learn about the host institution from former exchange students than were arts and science students, $\chi^2(1, N = 166) = 5.048, p = .025, V = .17$.

The last item asked respondents to indicate the three most important factors that led them to ultimately choose the host institution. Students had 11 possible options and could rank the top 3 factors. The most popular reasons to choose the host institution were: location or country (37%), reputation (28%), course offerings (14%), and academic programs (11%). However the decision to study on exchange at a particular institution was not driven by a single item. Students’ decisions were impacted by multiple factors. Combining the responses together demonstrates that 81% of all students considered location or country of the exchange as important, followed by 77% who considered the university reputation, 42% who considered the course offerings, and 33% who considered the academic programs available (see Figure 1). Items cited by fewer than 10% of students included size of city, size of institution, support services at host campus, and projected cost of living.

No significant differences were found by gender or duration of study in the primary reasons for choosing an exchange destination, but business students were more likely to choose a destination based on reputation of the institution, $\chi^2(1, N = 166) = 7.985, p = .005, V = .22$, than were arts and science students. Arts and science students considered course offerings, $\chi^2(1, N = 166) = 5.127, p = .024, V = .18$, more important than did business students in choosing their study abroad destination. Course offerings were more important for students from Asia than from Europe, $\chi^2(1, N = 160) = 13.688, p < .001, V = .29$, whereas feedback from previous students was more important for European students, $\chi^2(1, N = 166) = 19.371, p < .001, V = .35$. Finally, students from Asia found cost of living a more important consideration than did students from Europe, $\chi^2$
Research Question 2. What Are the Primary Motivations of Incoming Exchange Students?

The second research question investigated the primary reasons for studying on exchange by having students rate the importance of the 13 items in the SAGS. The two strongest motivations for studying abroad were because of a desire to “live in and make acquaintances in Canada” ($M = 4.71, SD = 0.55$) and “to interact with local people and learn more about the customs and traditions of Canada” ($M = 4.58, SD = 0.63$). The two weakest motivations for studying abroad were because of a desire to “be with other friends that were participating in an exchange” ($M = 2.81, SD = 1.49$) and to “establish ties with family/ethnic heritage” ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.25$).

The purpose of administering the SAGS was to create a set of factors that would enable a comparison of motivation among different independent variables. Factor analysis has been used widely in study abroad survey research (Carlson et al., 1990; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Sutton & Rubin, 2004) as it can demonstrate patterns of responses in which participants answered items in a similar way, reduce data to a more manageable size, and classify data in a more meaningful way (Field, 2009). In the current study, the SAGS items were analysed using principal axis factoring.
As the factors were presumed to be independent from each other, varimax rotation was chosen. This method attempts to load a smaller number of strongly correlated variables onto each factor; appropriate for a survey with a small number of items (Field, 2009). Only factors with eigenvalues greater than one were retained in the analysis (Kaiser, 1958), which is consistent with the majority of studies that use factor analysis in study abroad research.

The first attempts to produce a model with all 13 items were unsuccessful, as three survey items loaded onto more than one factor and the structure could not be easily interpreted. The two items “improve career prospects” and “improve my English or French language skills” had the weakest commonalities (.16 and .18, respectively) and factor loadings (.42 and .34, respectively) and lowered the scale reliabilities in which they were originally included. These two items were dropped from the factor analysis and retained as stand-alone items. A final factor analysis produced a clean model with the 11 items loading onto three factors. These three factors accounted for 59.91% of the variance among the 11 items and produced a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of .65, above the recommended value of .60 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The means and standard deviations for the three factors and two standalone items are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors and Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic motivation</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-cultural motivation</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and social motivation</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve my career prospects</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve my English or French language skills</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 182
Internal consistencies were calculated for each of the three factors using Cronbach’s alpha. The alpha value for the three factors was: .76 for cross-cultural motivation, .70 for personal and social motivation, and .77 for academic motivation. These values all meet or exceed the minimum acceptable level of .70 (Field, 2009).

The cross-cultural motivation factor ($M = 4.44, SD = 0.48$) was the highest rated, and personal and social motivation factor ($M = 3.16, SD = 0.91$) was the lowest rated, which suggests that students are significantly more cross-culturally motivated than academically or personally and socially motivated in their decision to study on exchange.

No gender differences were found across the three motivation factors and two individual items. Similarly, based on a series of one-way ANOVAs, there were no significant regional differences for cross-cultural, academic, or career motivations. Significant differences were found in the personal and social motivation of students depending on their region of origin, $F(2, 56.47) = 20.28$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc tests revealed that students from Asia had stronger personal motivations ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.63$) than did students from Europe ($M = 2.86, SD = 0.88$) or Australia and New Zealand ($M = 2.91, SD = 0.89$). These differences produced large effect sizes ($d = 1.12$ and $d = 0.99$, respectively). There was also a significant difference in terms of desire to improve English and French skills among the regions, $F(2, 44.75) = 22.374$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.42$. Unsurprisingly, students from Europe ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.18$) and Asia ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.93$) had stronger motivations to improve their language skills than did students from Australia and New Zealand ($M = 2.73, SD = 1.03$), which are two English-speaking countries. These differences produced large effect sizes $d = 1.05$ and $d = 1.31$, respectively.

Independent $t$ tests identified significant differences in three of five motivation categories based on program of study. Students in business were more motivated to go on exchange for the purposes of improving their career prospects ($M = 4.33, SD = 0.74$) than were arts and science students ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.93$), where $t(158) = 2.603$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.41$ (small). Business students were also more motivated to improve their English and French skills ($M = 4.42, SD = 0.98$) than were students in arts and science ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.10$), with $t(158) = 3.885$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.62$ (medium). Finally, business students ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.85$) had stronger personal and social motivations than did arts and science students ($M = 2.91, SD = 0.91$), $t(158) = 3.115$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.50$ (medium). Though this is a medium effect size, the mean scores for both groups of students are relatively low, suggesting that this difference may be statistically, not practically, significant.

Comparing the students who participated in a one or two term exchange revealed two significant differences. One-term students reported stronger personal and social motivations ($M = 3.27, SD = 0.89$) than did two-term students ($M = 2.86, SD = 0.87$), $t(179) = 2.691$, $p = .008$, $d = 0.40$ (small). One-term students also reported a stronger desire to improve their English and French skills ($M = 4.24, SD = 1.06$), than did full-year students ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.35$), $t(61.033) = 2.716$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.70$ (medium).
Coming to Canada to Study

The analysis of motivation, based on the SAGS, indicated that cross-cultural motivation was the strongest factor followed by academic. The personal and social motivation was the weakest factor for incoming exchange students. However, the importance of the personal and social motivation factor varied across groups of students. Though there were no significant differences between males and females, all other independent variables highlighted at least one significant difference. This suggests that the motivation of incoming exchange students is not uniform across the four social identity variables.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine where and how incoming exchange students gather information relating to their potential exchange destination and their motivation to study abroad. Incoming exchange students relied heavily on their home and the host study abroad office websites as well as study abroad advisors and former exchange students. Participants indicated that the primary source of information about their eventual host institution was derived from their home study abroad office and website. This study reports a larger role and desire of the incoming exchange students to seek out information on their own, particularly from websites and offices, than did Anderson’s (2007), which reported that students relied on advice from friends and family.

In choosing a destination for their exchange program, the location and country of the institution, followed by reputation, course offerings, academic programs, and student feedback are the most important factors for incoming exchange students. These findings also correspond with Anderson’s (2007), though the current study did not find program cost to be an important criterion. This is possibly because exchange students pay tuition to their home institution and are not charged differential program fees. Though Canada, as a location, was selected most often, it is probable that participants had several Canadian universities to apply to, and the items following location, reputation, and student feedback may in fact be of equal importance.

These results have significant implications for those who work with exchange students. The first is to ensure that partner universities have accurate and up-to-date information about their partners in their offices and especially on their websites. Similarly, it is important that home institution websites link to the correct sections of the host institution websites. Understanding that the majority of exchange students are either in arts and science or business programs, the host institutions may want to set up separate sections for both. Where external rankings and student testimonials are available, they should be posted or included in marketing documents. For arts and science students, ensuring that information about programs of study and available courses are easy to locate online and in offices could be effective in influencing more of them to choose the host institution. These recommendations can be implemented by encouraging periodic phone or video conversations between institutions. Students noted that they do rely on
the advice of their study abroad office advisors, therefore ensuring that the partner institutions staff have current information on the host university could result in more referrals and student applications.

The second research question examined the motivation of the incoming exchange students and found a very strong desire for a cross-cultural learning environment, followed by a distinctive academic opportunity, and finally, a unique social experience. These findings largely echo that of previous research (see Brewer, 1983; Carlson et al., 1990; Sánchez et al., 2006), which found cross-cultural reasons supersede academic or social reasons for studying abroad. The current study adds to the literature by exploring how these factors vary by the different social identity factors, primarily students’ region of origin and their program of study, and identified no significant differences between males’ and females’ motivation in their exchange. The study also provides effect sizes for group differences. This is analysis that is often missing from study abroad research and prevents comparisons of findings from occurring.

For staff working with exchange students the motivation results have several implications. Those who manage orientation programs for incoming exchange students may find it useful to incorporate a self-assessment version of the SAGS or utilize other goal planning exercises at the beginning of the exchange period. By understanding the goals of incoming students, staff advisors or trained student volunteers can introduce, locate, or help register students in activities and direct them toward experiences that will enable them to achieve their exchange goals. These planning exercises can aid students in organizing their time at the host institution for the richest student experiences. As it is the home institution that selects the students, reviews their statements of intent, or conducts the interviews, these exercises will help the host institution to learn more about the students who are choosing to study at their university. This guidance is valuable for students participating in an exchange program, which are more self-directed than are study abroad programs. Although exchange programs allow greater flexibility for students, the lack of direction can result in students not developing as much or achieving their goals (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). Failure to provide guidance and create opportunities to engage in the types of cross-cultural development activities they desire can have detrimental impacts on student development and negate the potential inherent in the experience abroad (Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011). As noted by Vande Berg et al. (2009), more frequent contact with a mentor led to higher levels of student development, and it is recommended that exchange students and peer mentors meet several times during the exchange.

This study was limited to the single institution from which the data were collected; it is unclear how future groups of exchange students would report their influences and motivations. In addition, though the motivation items were asked in the present, the students were asked to recall the factors and sources that influenced their decision of where to apply on exchange. All self-report data must be used with caution, but particularly retrospective self-report data, as used in the second research question. However, given that the responses corresponded with existing
research and the impracticalities of surveying students on multiple occasions, this is an acceptable limitation.

**Conclusion**

These findings lead to planned follow-up research, namely to what degree student motivations are being realized while abroad. It is hypothesized that the degree to which the student experience matches, meets, or exceeds motivation strongly influences the student learning and development that occurs while abroad. It is also likely the quality of the experience of students at the host campus strongly influences how they report the experience back to their home international offices and future, potential exchange students. Additional work exploring how exchange student motivation or expectations are met, the factors that influence the experience, and an investigation of where gaps between motivations and outcomes result are required in future research.

This research contributes to the overall field of study abroad research by providing an understanding of how motivations and influences of incoming exchange students differ by social identity. Given the reliance students placed on online research, there exists great potential for staff at the host institution in individual faculties to market their programs more specifically to target populations. Also, understanding the motivations of the incoming students creates potential for more relevant and effective onsite programming, especially in terms of specialized foreign language instruction and assistance and career development and exploration that could help incoming students to realize their goals in coming to the host institution. These programs could in turn encourage more students from abroad to the host campus.

This study highlights that the motivation of incoming exchange students is multifaceted and the influencing factors that aid students in choosing a location are complex. It demonstrates the uniqueness of the motivations and influences of students coming to Canada and the variance within the population of students. These influencing factors are what bring students to a particular campus. As exchanges are based organizationally and philosophically around the principles of reciprocity; it behoves the host institutions to act and intervene to help the incoming exchange student, not just in their adjustment to the campus, but also in discovering and engaging in the learning opportunities present on their campus. Where the host campus is able to facilitate the transition from exchange student motivation into experience and learning, the potential for strengthening the exchange agreements in terms of the number of students who are interested and able to participate is possible.

**References**


Caudrey, T., Petersen, M., & Shaw, P. (2008). The motivations of exchange students at Scandinavian universities. In M. Byram & F. Dervin (Eds.), *Students, staff and academic mobility in higher education* (pp. 114–130). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars.


Coming to Canada to Study


