Access and Equity in U.S. Study Abroad: Building a Research Agenda

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Introduction

Increasing participation in education abroad experiences is important to institutions of higher education for a variety of reasons. However, the student population that studies abroad suffers from severe underrepresentation of many student groups that comprise some of the fastest-growing in U.S. higher education, such as minority race/ethnicity groups, low-income students, and non-traditional students.

Research Agenda

Overarching goal: Identify policies and practices that serve to increase access to study abroad and equity in international experiences.

Sample Research Questions:

To what degree do factors related to students' financial resources, such as student loans, grants, financial need, and expected family contribution, relate to participation in study abroad? Does the relationship between study abroad and financial resources differ among race/ethnicity groups?

Do students belonging to minority race/ethnicity groups choose to study abroad in regions of the world that represent their cultural heritage?

What is the relationship between the implementation of state merit-based aid programs and study abroad participation?

What is the role of institutional context in students' access to study abroad and, importantly, equity in their study abroad experiences?

Are the study abroad participation patterns of community college students similar to those of their four-year counterparts?

Are community colleges a potential site for the democratization of study abroad?

Stratification Theory

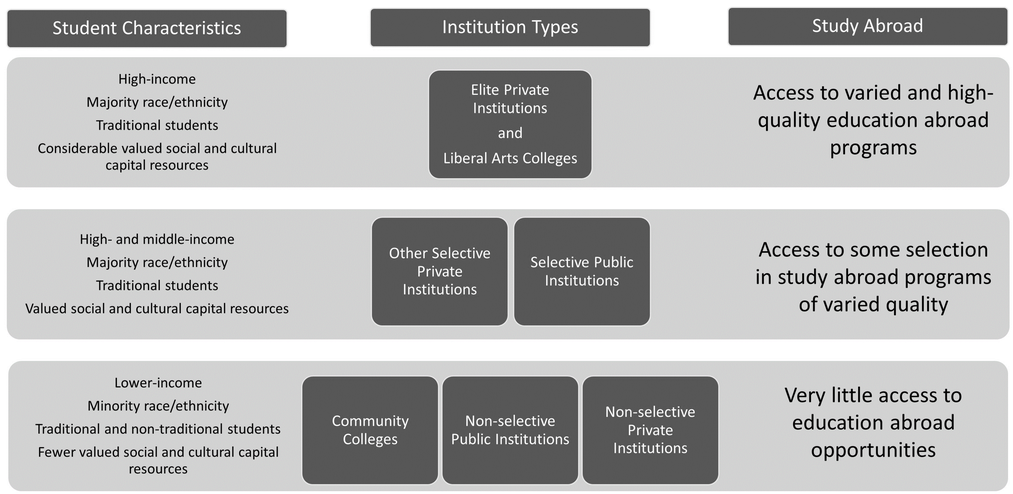

Figure 1: Stratification theory applied to U.S. study abroad

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Key Findings from Published and On-going Research

Financial aid

- Students receiving increased amounts of **grant aid** are *more likely* to participate in study abroad.
- Students incurring increased amounts of **loan debt** are *less likely* to participate in study abroad.
- While these findings are true across race/ethnicity groups, the relationship between **grant aid** and study abroad participation tends to be *weaker* among **African American and Hispanic students** compared to White students.
- The implementation of **state-sponsored merit-aid programs** is not necessarily associated with an increase in participation in study abroad.

Region of study abroad

- **Minority race/ethnicity students** are significantly more likely to study abroad in a location that represents their *cultural heritage*.

Institutional context

- Institutions that receive more funding in **state appropriations** send *higher percentages of their students abroad* on average.
- After controlling for a variety of institutional characteristics, **liberal arts institutions** send, on average, almost *2% more* of their students abroad on an annual basis.
- Compared to institutions in the northeast, institutions in the **southeast, southwest, and plains regions** send *proportionally more* of their students to study abroad on average.

Community colleges

- Community colleges that enroll a higher proportion of **international students** also are *more likely* to send students to study abroad.
- Community colleges located in **towns and rural areas** are *less likely* to send students abroad compared to community colleges in urban areas.
- By and large, the **characteristics of community college student populations** (e.g., race/ethnicity and gender compositions) *do not significantly relate* to the percentage of students studying abroad from these institutions.

Future Research

Changes in study abroad participation over Time (see figure to the right)

Study abroad at elite institutions

Differences in study abroad program characteristics among students attending different types of institutions

Community college study abroad patterns

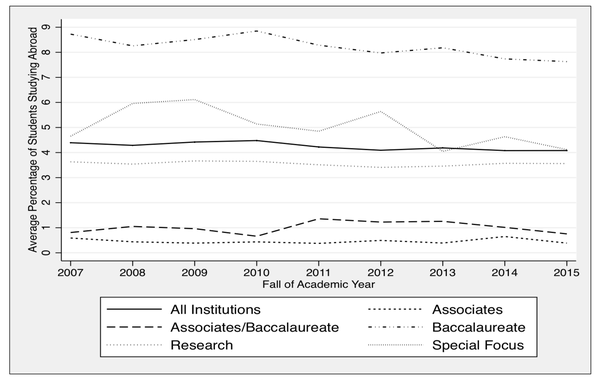

Figure 2: Average percentages of study abroad participation over time by Carnegie class

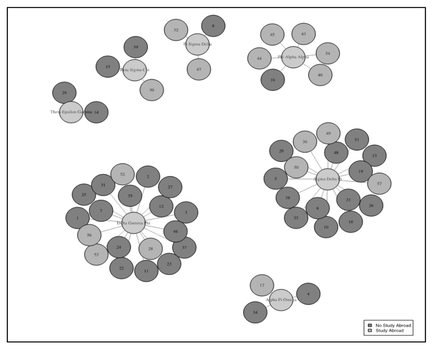

Figure 3: Study abroad patterns among fraternity and sorority peer groups

Peer influence and social capital in study abroad choices (see figure to the left)

Geographical differences in access to study abroad

The relationship between policy implementation and study abroad participation patterns

Equity in study abroad outcomes of diverse students