UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF IMMERSIVE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCES ON COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES STUDENT SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

By:

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(Under the Direction of Nicholas Fuhrman)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. This study specifically examined (1) motivation factors for completing an immersive study abroad experience, (2) the self-perceived competency of students at using soft skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they returned home, and (3) what about this experience makes it so unique. Qualitative research methods were used to conduct two focus groups, one focus group with students who participated in individual travel and the other with students who engaged in group travel. Significant Life Experience Research was used to examine the emotional and revealing side of human experiences while abroad and the development of soft skills through this experience. Results conducted that participants developed different soft skill depending on whether they traveled individually or with others.

INDEX WORDS: Immersive Study Abroad, Soft Skills, Significant Life Experience, Individual Study Abroad Experiences, Group Study Abroad Experiences, and Interdisciplinary College Experiences
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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate my thesis firstly to The Lord God Almighty. Without his faithful guidance, strength, patience, and perseverance I would not have been able to complete my thesis. I also want to dedicate my thesis to my parents, Virgil and Holly DeLoach. They have been solid Christian examples, incredible parents, and my “rocks” throughout my life. I have been tremendously blessed to call them my parents.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher will discuss the relationship between immersive study abroad experiences and the development of soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. Previous research clearly reviews all potential benefits that immersive study abroad experiences have on undergraduate students enrolled in a university. However, little is known about the impact of study abroad experiences on College of Agriculture undergraduate students. These students often participate in study abroad experiences and the impact of such experiences on their soft skill development warranted further investigation.

Soft Skills

There are many ways to define soft skills. For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined soft skills as oral communication, critical thinking/problem solving, initiative, leadership, teambuilding skills, and self-management (Brooks, Flanders, Jones, Kane, McKissick, & Shepherd, 2008; Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fieltiz, 2011). In a study conducted by Brooks et. al. (2008) Georgia agribusiness employers were surveyed to assess what skills, if any, recent graduates were lacking. Their findings indicated that employers believed recent college graduates had strong technical skills but lacked in the area of soft skills (Brooks et. al., 2008). According to Brooks et. al. (2008),
employers said that oral communication skills were the most required or preferred by the agribusiness employers surveyed followed by business ethics, critical thinking/problem solving, and the ability to demonstrate initiative. Through the analysis of the research presented above, the researcher for this study was able to identify the tremendous need for recent graduates to develop soft skills upon graduation in order to be successful in today’s workplace. Given the push for study abroad experiences within universities, this information leads the researcher to question the relationship between immersive study abroad experiences and the development of soft skills in undergraduates. Can College of Agriculture undergraduate students develop soft skills required or preferred by completing an immersive study abroad experience?"

Other studies also highlight the importance of soft skill development in undergraduate students upon graduation. A study conducted by Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, and Fielitz (2011) administered a cross-institutional survey that focused on the identification of essential soft skills necessary for students to successfully transition from college graduate to competitive employee in the agricultural and natural resource industry. From that study, seven “soft skill clusters” were identified as the most important soft skills needed for undergraduates to develop, including, “experiences, team skills, communication skills, leadership skills, decision making/problem solving skills, self-management skills, and professionalism skills,” (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, Fielitz, 2011, p. 2). Of the soft skills identified by Crawford et al. (2011), they can be ranked in the following order of priority when trade-offs need to be considered in the decision making process, “communication skills, decision making/problem solving skills, self-management skills, teamwork skills, professionalism skills, experiences, and
leadership skills,” (p. 9). After examining the aforementioned two studies, there are many similarities in the soft skills identified from the results of both of them. However, the researcher for this specific study noticed that neither study identified practices for undergraduate students to engage in to develop such essential skills. The researcher poses the question, “What experiences can universities provide students to ensure recent graduates develop these soft skills?”

**Immersive Study Abroad Experiences**

An immersive study abroad experience is defined for the foundation of this study as an experience abroad lasting at least six weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks). “Conventional wisdom in the study abroad field has held that more is better, the longer students study abroad the more significant the academic, cultural development, and personal growth benefits that occur,” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 151). Within the last 25 years, national study abroad enrollment trends have been drifting away from full-year study abroad programs and migrating towards shorter stints abroad. This lack of enrollment in immersive experiences abroad is caused by a variety of reasons such as economic recessions, college policy and other miscellaneous explanations (Dwyer, 2004). However, in Dwyer’s (2004) longitudinal study of study abroad program impacts spanning 50 years a positive correlation between length of participation in a study abroad and specific learning outcomes was found. For example, comparing students who experienced a semester-long or summer only study broad experience to students who participated in a full year study abroad, these students had more interest in their major and were more likely to attend graduate school (Dwyer, 2004). A study conducted by
Norris and Gillespie (2009) also reported that students who completed a study abroad experience were 20% more likely to attend graduate school. The studies cited above indicate that there are potentially significant positive academic outcomes in relation to participating in longer study abroad programs.

Recent research indicates that students who participate in an immersive study abroad program experience tremendous person growth and develop a sense of cultural awareness. Studies also show that participants of immersive study abroad experiences (lasting 6 weeks or longer) are more culturally sensitive and globally competent upon return. Dwyer (2004) found that full-year study abroad students were “twice as likely to cultivate lifelong friendships with host-country nationals,” (p. 157). In the same study, full-year students also had a greater understanding of their own cultural values and biases. They were able to develop a sophisticated manner of examining the world around them (Dwyer, 2004). Similarly, Norris and Gillespie (2009) reported that study abroad participants have a stronger appreciation and passion for other languages and knowledge of foreign cultures. Participants were also more likely to seek out diversity in friends and other life relationships. These studies indicate that students who participate in an immersive study abroad experience are likely to be more open-minded and perceptive in today’s job market.

Even in today’s sophisticated, globalized economy, recent research indicates that U.S. businesses struggle to find culturally aware personnel. Dwyer (2004) found that students who complete a full-year study abroad experience are more likely to pursue a career path that allows them to speak a language other than English in the workplace. Dwyer (2004) also concluded that students who study abroad for a full-year generally
consider working for multi-national corporations and potentially choose to work overseas instead of in the U.S. Full-year study abroad students were also two to three times more likely to have their career path influenced or changed because of their study abroad experience (Dwyer, 2004). Another study conducted by Crossman and Clarke (2009) demonstrated the relevance for college graduates to have an understanding of the importance of cultural sensitivity and the capacity to generate and maintain relationships in a culturally diverse workplace. However, according to Crossman and Clarke (2008), their results concluded that study abroad may not enhance longer-term career progression but it can give recent graduates an advantage during the interview process. Crossman and Clarke (2008) highly recommend that universities encourage students to complete an international experience before graduation in an effort to acquire a foreign language and cultural awareness thus improving their “employability skills” (p. 609). A comprehensive review of the literature revealed an immersive study abroad experience (lasting at least 6 weeks abroad but no longer than 16 weeks/ an academic semester) provide participants with positive academic learning outcomes, personal growth and long-term career impacts.

**Theoretical Framework**

Significant Life Experience Research (SLER) is generally used within the discipline of environmental education to assess and understand significant experiences that influence people’s environmental concerns and behaviors. It is most typically associated with qualitative research methods, thus examining the emotional and revealing side of human experiences (Chawla, 1998). The primary goal of SLER is to understand a
revealing, formative experience in a person’s life that in turn influences their feelings or behaviors and the way they interact with others in diverse environments. For the purpose of this study, it was used as a guiding light to develop the focus group guide and interpret the students’ responses. SLER is an excellent theory base that meets the challenge of abiding by the rules of reliability and validity while continuing to maintain sensitivity to participants’ emotional life and self-understanding (Chawla, 1998). The many strengths and weaknesses associated with this research as well as how it has been integrated into a new academic discipline will be discussed in extensive detail in Chapter 2.

**Significant Life Experience Research, Soft Skills and Immersive Study Abroad Experiences**

In order to understand the impact of immersive study abroad experiences on College of Agriculture undergraduate students and the development of soft skills it is important to establish a theory that will allow the researcher to assess the dynamic of the relationship between the two. Students participating in an immersive study abroad experience are also interacting with others in a diverse environment. SLER is a method the researcher used to examine the emotional and revealing side of human experiences while abroad and the development of soft skills through this experience. Essentially, what about study abroad experiences contributes to the development of soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students?
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. Current research discusses the benefits of immersive study abroad experiences through academic learning outcomes, personal growth, and long-term career impacts as well as the necessity for developing soft skills in order to be successful in today’s workplace. However, the gaps in the existing research provide ample justification for the researcher to conduct this specific study and assess whether College of Agriculture undergraduate students develop soft skills through completing an immersive study abroad experience. The specific research questions that guided this study are listed below:

1. What motivational factors influence students to complete an immersive study abroad experience?

2. What is the self-perceived competency of students at using soft skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they return home?

3. What about this experience makes it so unique?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are found throughout this document and warranted explanation:
**Significant Life Experience Research:** A method to understand a revealing, formative experience in a person’s life that in turn influences their feelings or behaviors and the way they interact with others and in diverse environments (Chawla, 1998).

**Soft Skills:** Oral communication, teambuilding skills, self-management, critical thinking/problem solving, initiative, and leadership (Brooks, Flanders, Jones, Kane, McKissick, & Shepherd, 2008; Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fieltiz, 2011).

**Immersive Study Abroad Experience:** An experience abroad lasting at least six weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks).

**Construct:** A construct is a theme contained on a questionnaire that is comprised of individual but related questions that have the same answer choice.

**College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES):** College of Agriculture at a Land-grant university.

**University of Georgia (UGA):** Land-grant university in the southeastern United States.

**Qualitative Research:** “A generic term for a variety of research approaches that study phenomena in their natural settings, without predetermined hypotheses,” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 565).

Study Limitations

This study sought to understand the relationship between immersive study abroad experiences in College of Agriculture undergraduate students and soft skill development. This qualitative study is unique to the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) at the University of Georgia (UGA) but cannot be generalized to other College’s of Agriculture nationwide. One of the limitations of this study was that participants self-reported on their immersive study abroad experiences and how those influenced soft skill development. The researcher is left to assume that participants were honest in their responses to focus groups questions. Also, the researcher’s opinions of immersive study abroad experiences could have potentially influenced the interpretation of the data. The disclosure of the researcher’s bias is documented in the researcher subjectivity statement displayed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The researcher was interested in examining the relationship, if any, of immersive study abroad experiences on College of Agriculture undergraduate students and the development of soft skills such as oral communication, team building skills, and initiative. Although there has been much research conducted to assess the impact this experience has on students contextual outcomes, there has been little research to understand the impact this significant life experience has on soft skill development. In College of Agriculture undergraduate students, is there a relationship between immersive study abroad experiences and the development of soft skills?

A review of previous literature cites an advantage to immersive study abroad experiences in the contextual outcomes described below, but there is little research that suggests that students gain in the specific outcome of soft skills. This chapter reviews past literature on other outcomes of student development in relation to study abroad experiences within the last 10 years. The three areas that have been identified as the most significant gains in student development are (1) academic outcomes and study abroad, (2) personal growth outcomes and study abroad, and (3) long-term career impact/professional development and study abroad. The relationship between student demographics and study abroad outcomes will be discussed. This chapter will end with a
discussion of Significant Life Experience Research and how it can be used to explain the impact of an immersive study abroad experience on undergraduate students.

**Academic Outcomes and Study Abroad**

Studies often summarize the impact of study abroad experiences based on the duration of the student’s experience. In a longitudinal study of study abroad program impacts spanning 50 years, Dwyer (2004) reported a positive correlation between length of participation in a study abroad and specific learning outcomes. For example, comparing students who experienced a semester-long or summer only study abroad experience to students who participated in a full year study abroad, full year study abroad students had more interest in their major and were more likely to attend graduate school (Dwyer, 2004). A study conducted by Norris and Gillespie (2009) also reported that students who completed a study abroad experience were 20% more likely to attend graduate school. Comparatively, 56% of global-career alumni earned graduate degrees when compared to students who did not participate in study abroad (Norris & Gillespie, 2009). This research reports that study abroad is an influential factor in continuing education beyond a bachelor’s degree.

In addition to the positive academic learning outcomes, study abroad experiences can also influence student career paths in a similar positive manner. Dwyer (2004) concluded that full year study abroad students were more likely to be career oriented and develop professional skills and contacts that influenced their future career paths. Overall, study abroad had a most significant impact on students in the areas of foreign language development, an increased interest in academic pursuits, personal development, as well as
future career choices (Dwyer, 2004). Ingraham and Peterson (2004) found that faculty and students believed study abroad helped participating students to “learn more and more deeply while studying abroad” regardless of program length (p. 93). In addition, Ingraham and Peterson (2004) reported that the grade point average (GPA) of graduating study abroad students was typically higher than that of students who did not participate in study abroad. Most studies reported that the academic benefits seem to increase as the length of the study abroad experience increases.

**Personal Growth Outcomes and Study Abroad**

Recent research indicates that students who participate in an immersive study abroad experience tremendous personal growth and are more culturally aware. Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2008) found that government, business, and university employees are of the opinion that student participation in study abroad must be encouraged to secure economic prosperity and global leadership in the United States. Studies show that participants of immersive study abroad experiences (lasting 6 weeks or longer) are more culturally sensitive and globally competent upon return. In a longitudinal study conducted by Dwyer (2004), full-year study abroad students were “twice as likely to cultivate lifelong friendships with host-country nationals,” (p. 157). In the same study, full-year students also had a greater understanding of their own cultural values and biases. They were able to develop a sophisticated manner of examining the world around them (Dwyer, 2004). Similarly, Norris and Gillespie (2009) reported that study abroad participants have a stronger appreciation and passion for other languages and knowledge of foreign cultures. Participants were also more likely to seek out diversity in friends and other life relationships. These studies indicate that students who
participate in an immersive study abroad experience are likely to be more open-minded and perceptive in today’s job market.

However, some authors question whether study abroad participants are, by deciding to participate, more likely to benefit from international experiences. Dwyer (2004) suggests that study abroad participants may be more likely to benefit because the international experience encourages tolerance of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences and may be a priori, a self-selected, more open-minded group. Full-year study abroad students were also considered to be more socially advanced. Upon their return from a study abroad, these students furthered their participation in their community organizations and consciously allowed their experience to influence their decisions within their families (Dwyer, 2004).

Another study conducted by Ingraham and Peterson (2004) students reported after completing a study abroad they experienced an “intangible change of perception of the world and oneself,” (p. 94). One participant of the study was reported saying:

“It is…interesting to see what attitudes, behaviors and other personality traits have stayed the same in myself, now that I am free from US and home influences. I feel like I have a greater understanding of who I am and why, now that I can look at myself in a completely different situation. It was almost like an experiment: take away natural surrounding and friends and family and see what stays the same. It is incredible how clear my perception of my own self – my values, strengths and weakness – is now that I have looked at it more objectively,” (p. 94).
In the same study, students shared that, “Cultural Immersion takes effort,” (p. 95) and that it’s important to learn the language, history, and cultural norms of the host country. Another study more recently by Orahood, Woolf, and Kruze (2008) found that study abroad has more of a personal growth impact on business students rather than career choice. One student shared,

“I would highly recommend an overseas study program for everyone, including my own children someday. I feel that the experience did more for my emotional growth and confidence than it did for my intellect,” (Orahood, Woolf, & Kruze, p. 138).

This type of data suggests that participants potentially develop just as much if not more so in the area of personal growth rather than intellectually.

Well-rounded is a term used by many study abroad participants to describe themselves after having completed an immersive experience. Orahood, Woolf, and Kruze (2008) also reported that participants described themselves as better-rounded, having learned more integrity, stronger communication skills, and interpersonal skills. Many participants described their experience as “invaluable.” Their study concluded that the transferable skills such as communication, flexibility, and adaptation that participants gained through study abroad were deemed essential life skills (Orahood, Woolf, & Kruze, 2008). Another study conducted by Crossman and Clarke (2009) reported that universities have stated the necessity for graduates to develop transferable skills such as oral communication, problem solving, and decision-making. According to Crossman and
Clarke (2009), the most positive outcomes of study abroad include the potential for vast networking, the chance to involve oneself in experiential learning, foreign language acquisition, and soft skill development.

In today’s world it is essential that college graduates understand the term *globalization* and how to apply it professionally. Schnusenberg, Jong, and Goel (2012) reported that the most important international skill sought by business firms was being culturally aware implying that one must know and understand cross-cultural differences. Wynveen, Kyle, and Tarrant (2012) shared that a “Global citizen views the world as interdependent and acts to advance himself or herself and others by understanding the interconnections among people, institutions, and the environment,” (p. 335). If students choose not to complete an immersive study abroad experience, how else do they learn to become a global citizen?

However, study abroad does present challenges for participants involved. Ingraham and Peterson (2004) reported that the psychological challenges presented through the experience such as unfamiliarity could be severe. Students can have feelings such as homesickness and sadness that could possibly lessen the beneficial outcomes of the experience. However, all research evidence suggests that students do experience positive and significant personal growth through a study abroad experience (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004).

**Long-Term Career Impact, Professional Development and Study Abroad**

Currently, globalization is occurring at a rapid rate, charging universities with the responsibility of creating cross-culturally competent employees. However, recent
research indicates that U.S. businesses struggle to find culturally aware personnel. An initial study by Orahood, Kruze, and Pearson (2004) was conducted to assess the impact study abroad had on students in The Kelly School of Business (KSB) at Indiana University (IU). The study concluded that students who completed a study abroad experience were more likely to consider job positions with an international component than those who did not study abroad. Also, students who did complete a study abroad experience were reported to be actively searching for job postings in foreign countries (Orahood, Kruze, & Pearson 2004). Dwyer (2004) supports these findings by concluding that students who complete a full-year study abroad experience are more likely to pursue a career path that allows them to speak a language other than English in the workplace. Dwyer (2004) also concluded that students who study abroad for a full-year generally consider working for multi-national corporations and potentially choose to work overseas instead of in the U.S. Full-year study abroad students were also two to three times more likely than their counterparts to have their career path influenced or changed because of their study abroad experience (Dwyer, 2004). Both of these studies were conducted within the same academic year at two separate institutions and reported similar findings. Will more recent studies find similar results?

A follow up study conducted by Orahood, Woolf, and Kruze (2008) surveyed alumni of KSB at IU to assess the impact that study abroad has on students’ career choices. KSB students at IU are required to complete an international dimension requirement (IDR) within their degree curriculum. Students at KSB may complete this requirement in one of four ways:

Orahood, Woolf, and Kruze (2008) found that business students who did complete a study abroad experience tended to have significantly larger interests in working for a company with an international focus or component. However, the number of students who did not complete a study abroad experience working within the international business realm was greater than the number of students who did complete a study experience that are currently working within the international business community. These findings suggest that even graduates who do not have a particular interest in working in the global community still see international facets of their job (Orahood, Woolf, & Kruze, 2008). It also concluded that business students who did complete a study abroad experience were more likely to choose a career in the global community or leave the Midwest to find employment (Orahood, Woolf, & Kruze, 2008). Each of these research studies demonstrated the value in incorporating study abroad experiences into business students’ curriculum.

Another study conducted by Crossman and Clarke (2009) demonstrated the relevance for college graduates to have an understanding of the importance of cultural sensitivity-the capacity to generate and maintain relationships in a culturally diverse workplace. However, according to Crossman and Clarke (2008) their results concluded that study abroad may not enhance longer-term career progression but it does give recent graduates an advantage during the interview process. Crossman and Clarke (2008)
highly recommend that universities encourage students to complete an international experience before graduation in an effort to acquire a foreign language and a sense of cultural awareness thus improving their “employability skills” (p. 609). Interestingly, when comparing studies on the efficacy of study abroad and its correlation with career paths, it seems that students once chose to work within the global community: now recent graduates do not have the choice. Instead, research reports that in some fashion, recent graduates typically find some facet of their job to be internationally related and international skills are now required.

**Student Demographics and Study Abroad**

Assessing the demographics of students in previous studies further supports the need to examine the impact of study abroad on college of agriculture undergraduate students. In fact, little work has been done examining the impact of study abroad on College of Agriculture students. Most studies highlight demographics such as undergraduate students who participate in study abroad in business schools. For example, a study conducted by Orahood, Kruze, and Pearson (2004) wanted to assess how study abroad participation in undergraduate students in KSB at IU affected their future career paths. A follow-up study was conducted by Orahood, Woolf, and Kruze (2008) to assess changes in career paths of KSB students since the initial study. Other studies specifically recognize and assess the projected long-term career impact and professional development study abroad experiences have on students enrolled in a college of liberal arts and sciences (Franklin, 2010). Research also suggests that there is a gender gap associated with the intent to study abroad. A study conducted by Salisbury, Umbach,
Paulsen and Pascarella (2008) recognized that the typical study abroad student is white, female, and a humanities or social science major. With these demographics, it is essential that researchers learn reasons why there is little participation in study abroad by males and students enrolled in a college of agriculture.

**What Soft Skills Are Employers Looking for in Recent Graduates?**

Many studies have been conducted to assess the importance of soft skills and the role they play in the employability of new graduates. Soft skills are known as the interpersonal qualities that individuals possess such as oral communication skills, leadership, and teambuilding skills. Many employers feel that it is very important for recent graduates to have strong soft skills when entering the job market (Robles, 2012). In fact, recent research has shown soft skills are ranked higher in order of importance, by employers than discipline knowledge (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz, 2011). However, faculty and students found discipline knowledge to be more important than soft skills (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, and Fielitz 2011). According to Crawford, et al. (2011) the seven most important soft skill “clusters” for recent graduates to have are “Experiences, team skills, communication skills, leadership skills, decision making/problem solving skills, self-management skills, and professionalism skills,” (p. 2). The most important soft skill cluster ranked by all participants surveyed was communication skills. Within the communication cluster, additional skills viewed as the most important included but were not limited to “Listen effectively, communicate accurately and concisely, effective oral communication, communicate appropriately and professional using social media,” (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz, 2011, p. 9).
The second and third most important soft skill cluster found Crawford et al. (2011) study decision-making/problem solving and self-management. Comparatively, another study conducted by Robles (2012) found that integrity and communication were the top two soft skills needed in recent graduates in today’s workforce. Soft skills are becoming an essential skill set for recent graduates to have in order to be successful in today’s workforce. A study conducted at the University of Georgia (UGA) by Brooks, Flanders, Jones, Kane, McKissick, and Shepherd (2008) examined Georgia’s Agribusiness Industry to assess attributes needed in recent College of Agriculture graduates to be competitive in today’s workforce. They concluded similar findings to that of Crawford et al. (2011) and Roles (2012) in that oral communication skill was the number one attribute needed among recent graduates. Other skills Brooks et al. (2008) identified as required or preferred by Georgia’s Agribusiness Industry leaders included “business ethics, critical thinking/problem solving, initiative, customer relations, leadership/team building skills, office software/computer competencies, and written communication skills,” (p. 5). A study by Velasco (2011) states it best; “assessing how different graduates bring ‘value’ to the organization will become difficult.” In other words the challenge for human resource professionals will be how to separate the ‘wheat’ (scarce talent) from the ‘straw’ (abundance university degrees)” (p. 514).

**Significant Life Experience Research and Study Abroad**

Significant Life Experience Research (SLER) is generally used within the discipline of environmental education to assess and understand significant experiences that influence people’s environmental concerns and behaviors. It is most typically
associated with qualitative research methods, thus examining the emotional and revealing side of human experiences (Chawla, 1998). For the purpose of this study, it is used as a foundational theoretical framework to understand how the significant life experience that is an immersive study abroad affects College of Agriculture students’ emotions and behaviors. The primary goal of SLER is to understand a revealing, formative experience in a person’s life that in turn influences their feelings or behaviors and the way they interact with others and in diverse environments. Students participating in study abroad are also interacting with others in a diverse environment. SLER is an excellent theory base that meets the challenge of abiding by the rules of reliability and validity while continuing to maintain sensitivity to participants’ emotional life and self-understanding (Chawla, 1998).

One of the most important strengths associated with this research is that it is qualitative, allowing the researcher to gain a deep, richer understanding of participants’ interpretative viewpoints on the subject matter, a necessity to fulfill an understanding of not only people’s actions but more specifically the reasons behind their actions (Chawla, 1998). This research originated with a study conducted by Tanner (1980). Additional strengths based on review of other research using SLER are outlined below (Chawla, 1998, p. 361):

- Qualitative
- Cumulative, building on a coherent tradition
- Lifespan perspective
- Complementary open-and close-ended methodologies
Subjects in the earliest reports of SLER were typically white, male and dedicated to environmental education or the preservation of wilderness and wildlife. However subsequent studies have branched out by including women and people from other culture, countries, and ethnic backgrounds (Chawla, 1998). For this specific study, the researcher chose to diversify this research even further by applying it to a completely different academic discipline as well as type of student. This type of research has broadened its perspective to use interviews as well as open-ended questions instead of surveys or questionnaires.

In this study, the researcher chose to broaden its usage by conducting focus groups in hopes of further engaging the autobiographical memory, the premise of which SLER is based upon. All SLER probes participants to recall formative events; the sheer dependence of “autobiographical memory characterizes all survey and interview research, as even studies that examine people’s experience of immediate events, such as a political campaign or a school reform, draw upon long-term memory and interpretations of life events,” (Chawla, 1998, p. 363). Chawla (1998) gives an excellent example of how the autobiographical memory works. “In a charming scene in the movie Gigi, an elderly man and woman reminisce about their first evening out together as young lovers, each recalling details such as the location, hour of dinning, and color of her dress vividly but differently,” (Chawla, 1998, p. 363). Research supports this inaccuracy with memory; however, it does support the reputation of memory that it fares much better when remembering broad outlines of critical life events. “The elderly couple are unlikely to forget, for example that they were in love or changing phases of their feelings for each other over time,” (Chawla, 1998, p. 636). The researcher in the current study chose to
conduct focus groups to collect data in order to have the highest level of engagement of autobiographical memory so students would reveal all of the “big pictures” of their immersive study abroad experience.

Even with all the current strengths of SLER, it is also characterized by many recurring weaknesses in design and analysis (Chawla, 1998). One such coherent weakness as described by Chawla (1998) is the self-referencing nature of this research custom; there are many improvements that can be made in comparability of current studies. Chawla (1998) references several weaknesses of SLER that the current study seeks to directly address and improve on. These include:

- Inconsistent criterion measures
- Lack of testing for intercoder reliability
- Lack of comparison groups (p. 365)

Although Chawla (1998) cites several weaknesses of SLER this study attempted to minimize some of those. For example, to address inconsistent criterion measures the researcher-recruited students that met the current study’s specific criterion. In order for a student to participate in either focus group they had to meet two criteria: 1) All of the participants had completed an immersive study abroad experience. An immersive study abroad experience is defined for the foundation of this study as an experience abroad lasting at least four weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks), and 2) Each participant had to fit within the definition of SLER as defined above. The researcher addressed a cited weakness, lack of testing for intercoder reliability by ensuring a peer review process for the data collected. Two other peers reviewed the data.
to compare the domains and ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Finally the researcher addressed the weakness of lack of comparison groups through comparing the data of the two focus groups. One focus group consisted of students who participated in a semester internship abroad and the other focus group contained students who completed a semester exchange abroad. Even though the connection in length abroad could provide similar answers, the two different types of experiences would likely provide enough differences in answers making an excellent example of comparison in SLER. More details about data collection methods are shared in the next chapter.

**Summary**

In summary, the literature of past research has provided relevant understandings of academic learning outcomes, personal growth outcomes, long-term career impact and professional development, soft skill development and significant life experience research. The literature clearly reviews all potential benefits immersive study abroad experiences have to offer for undergraduate students enrolled in a university and how significant life experience research can help explain its impact. However, there is a significant gap in research in understanding how immersive study abroad experiences affect College of Agriculture undergraduate students and their development of soft skills because of an immersive study abroad experience. Although significant life experience research has been cited in the field of environmental education, it offers promise in understanding the outcomes of study abroad experiences. In the proceeding chapters the researcher will attempt to answer these questions and bridge this gap in the literature.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In order to understand the effects an immersive study abroad experience has on undergraduate students in a College of Agriculture, a qualitative study was conducted. Two focus group sessions were held with undergraduate students to help the researcher understand the importance of immersive study abroad and its effect on participating undergraduate students. Participants were asked to describe their study abroad experience and how the experience contributed to strengthening the “soft skills” described in the review of literature.

This chapter discusses the methods used during this study including the justification for the study, researcher subjectivity, site selection, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis steps.

Research Question and Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. Recent studies have reported mixed findings on the value of study abroad experiences as compared to formal internship experiences. Some studies have found that there are positive long-term academic outcomes of study abroad while others report there is little known about the impact of study abroad as it relates to soft skills.
For the purposes of this study, an “immersive” study abroad experience was defined as an experience abroad lasting at least six weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks). The researcher was interested in understanding how undergraduate students perceived their study abroad experience and whether or not they believed that their experience was as valuable or more valuable than a formal internship experience. The researcher looked at College of Agriculture undergraduate students as a model to guide other colleges as they consider ways to provide relevant learning experiences, which strengthen student soft skills.

**Justification**

A qualitative approach was used for this study because the researcher felt that qualitative data would provide a deeper understanding of the participants’ experience abroad. In addition, considering the lack of research in this topic area, the exploratory nature of this study warranted using qualitative data collection techniques. Through qualitative research methods, the researcher was able to establish a trusting relationship with participants and ask probing questions. Quantitative research methods, such as a questionnaire with response options would not have allowed for participants to provide the detailed information necessary for this research study. In addition, themes that emerged from the focus group findings could be used to develop constructs on a quantitative questionnaire for future studies with larger sample sizes.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

Qualitative research is typically influenced by the researcher’s background and previous life experiences. It is important that the researcher acknowledges their
subjectivity and that the reader is made aware of any potential subjectivity. According to Glesne (2011) “Subjectivity, is equated with bias and seen as something to control against and to mitigate its influence in research,” (p. 151). The subjectivity of the researcher is described below:

I grew up in the small one red-light town of Fort White, Florida. Although my surroundings were small, I knew from a very early age that I wanted to explore and learn more about the world outside of my small town. My mother’s parents were avid travelers and began taking my brother and I on annual trips to the Smoky Mountains at the age of five. Every spring break until eighth grade, we traveled to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee to see the mountains and experience all that region of the world had to offer.

During the Summer of 2002, my grandparents decided to take my mother, brother, sister and I “out west” for three weeks. It was on this trip I experienced many different cultures, landscapes, and “things” so unique and completely different from my bubble of Fort White. The following summer my father decided he wanted to travel with us but only if we repeated the trip taken the previous year. At the time it seemed like it would be a boring trip because I’d seen everything the year before. However, after reflecting on that experience and seeing the same landmarks twice, I believe that was defining moment in my life. Instead of just “checking the box” of seen it, I was able to digest the different cultures and landscapes I had seen. It made me ask the question, “If there is this much diversity in the United States, how do other people live continents away?”

The very next summer in 2004, I got my chance to see just how other people lived continents away. Towards the end of my freshman year, a teacher at my high school was
going to sponsor a trip with EF Tours across most of Europe. This specific tour company is designed for students between the ages of 15 and 25. The accommodations, food and means of travel were economical and afforded students the opportunity to see the world at a pace and budget they could enjoy. To my surprise, my mother signed me up for the trip and also told me that her sister, my Aunt Bobbie would be traveling with me. As a freshman in high school I’d just completed my first social studies credit, world cultures. My mother explained to me that on this tour I would see many of the things we’d discussed in class such as the Roman Coliseum and the Vatican. I stood in almost sheer disbelief, but soon, those thoughts and images that I formed in my mind would come to life.

My first trip abroad was indescribable; as soon as the plane landed I felt goose bumps and wondered what about this side of the world could be so different. I soon learned and fell in love with the diverse cultures, smells, landscapes, architecture and history that different “worlds” had to offer. I’ve often heard people say the travel bug has bitten them; if that’s true, I was covered in bites.

After high school and four more trips abroad, I channeled my academic interests into international affairs. Attending the University of Florida (UF), I majored in Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC). I quickly became involved in student leadership programs such as the Leadership Institute (LI) for undergraduate students within the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS), and also the CALS Ambassador program. Each of these programs placed a heavy emphasis on international travel and cultivated students to be “Global Gators,” thinking on an international scale according to our agricultural and majors. With each of these programs
I traveled internationally. The CALS LI experience gave me the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica, learning about agricultural production there and Costa Rican culture. With the CALS Ambassador program I traveled to China, a completely different culture from anything I experienced previously in my travels and a unique system of agricultural production methods.

After graduating from the UF, I attended the University of Georgia (UGA) to pursue my Master’s degree in Agricultural Leadership. Even here, I am still interested in broadening and internationalizing my education. Currently, I am working with the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) Office of Global Programs on completing my requirements for a Certificate in International Agriculture and also my research interests, “Understanding the Impact of Study Abroad Programs on College Student’s Soft Skills in a College of Agricultural and Environmental Science.”

The researcher did attempt to remain objective during data collection, analysis and interpretation. However, the previous life experiences and personal beliefs of the researcher could have affected probing questions asked during the focus groups. Other measures, described later in this chapter, were taken by the researcher in order to accurately represent the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

**Qualitative Measures of Validity and Reliability**

In qualitative research, the integrity of the study and results of it rely on addressing the issue of validity. To insure that the results from this study were valid, many strategies were used to assure validity and reliability. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002), “Validity in qualitative research concerns the accuracy or
truthfulness of the findings. The term most frequently used by qualitative researchers to refer to this characteristic is credibility,“ (p. 119) or the believability of a researcher’s interpretations, observations, and conclusions.

One way the researcher ensured trustworthiness was through peer review and debriefing, described by Glesne (2011) as an “External reflection and input on your work,” (p. 49). The researcher’s peers (fellow graduate students) reviewed the data collected and initial analysis of the researcher. With this material, they were able to determine if the researcher’s interpretation of the material was accurate and consistent with their own interpretations. These reviewers were able to help the researcher determine if there was a problem with the researcher’s initial analysis or if more data was needed for a more in-depth understanding of the original research question.

To ensure that all data collected was accurately described and interpreted based on the participant’s experience member checks were also conducted. According to Ary, Ary et al. (2002), a member check is where “The researcher solicits feedback from the participants themselves about the study’s findings” (p. 436). Member checks were only conducted after all focus group sessions were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts from those focus groups were then sent to each participant for them to review and confirm the accuracy taken by the researcher. All themes coded by the researcher were also sent to participants for their review. This feedback is crucial for the researcher because “The participants may help the researcher gain further insight/and or call attention to something that he or she missed” (Ary et al., 2002, p. 436).

The researcher also used reflexivity in order to increase the validity and credibility of the study. Reflexivity is defined by Ary et al. (2002) as “The use of self-
reflection to recognize one’s own biases and to actively seek them out,” (p. 454). The researcher had predisposed beliefs about the research subject and possible responses given by participants in this study because of her previous experiences with study abroad. This step in ensuring credibility was most important to guarantee that the data was reported and interpreted accurately by the researcher. Lastly, the researcher searched for negative case analysis, a conscious search for negative peer reviewed work that displays evidence that disproves what the researcher believes the data will show in order to refine his or her working hypotheses (Glesne, 2011).

Site Selection

The researcher chose UGA as the data collection site because of the importance it places upon integrating global learning experiences into undergraduate curriculum. The Office of International Education (OIE) at UGA website says the following (http://international.uga.edu/about/), “the OIE views internationalization as a comprehensive process that is woven into all aspects of the university’s mission: teaching, research, and service” (para. 1) The website goes on to state, Annually, over 2,000 UGA students, nearly 6 percent of the student population, study abroad each year, selecting from over one hundred programs led by UGA faculty. The university has three year-round residential sites for study abroad in Costa Rica, Oxford, England, and Cortona, Italy. One in four graduating seniors has studied abroad for academic credit during their time at UGA (para. 2). The researcher chose to narrow her focus to CAES because of its dedication to ensuring students and faculty have a complete understanding of our current global
environment and become effective global leaders. According to the Office of Global Program’s (OGP) website (http://www.global.uga.edu/students/index.html) “International programs are for everyone, and in our increasingly global world, discovering a country outside of the United States can help you to excel academically, in business and throughout your life” (para. 6). The researcher also chose to collect data in the Hoke Smith Building on UGA’s Athens campus. The researcher chose this building because all participants worked extensively with faculty in Hoke Smith (where the OGP is housed) to prepare for their immersive study abroad experience in a comfortable environment. This familiar environment would increase the likelihood that participants would openly express their honest thoughts regarding their study abroad experience.

The researcher is currently a student at UGA and is pursing a Certificate in International Agriculture. She will also be collecting data in the same building with participants who have had similar experiences to her own. Glesne (2011) refers to research conducted within one’s own institution or agency as “backyard research.” According to Glesne (2011), “When studying in your own backyard, you often already have a role—as a teacher or principal or caseworker or friend. When you add on the researcher role, both you and those around you may experience confusion at times over which role you are or should be playing,” (p. 41). There are many reasons why researchers chose to do backyard research. The first reason being the convenience of available participants and information, rapport is already established, and the data collected may be useful for the institution or agency that the researcher is working for, the professional or personal life of the researcher (Glesne, 2011). The researcher for this study understands that participant responses to her questions will be extremely valuable
for CAES and the OGP, but she does enter this study with a heightened sense of consciousness for potential difficulties or basis. Conducting backyard research will help reduce this potential.

**Participant Selection**

The participants for this study were purposefully selected by the OGP. According to Patton (2002, p. 46) “The logic and power of purposeful sampling…leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research…” (As cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 44). A total of 10 of participants who have completed an immersive study abroad experience were chosen by faculty members in the OGP to participate in this study. These faculty members already knew the students and were able to contact them for inclusion in the study because of their established rapport.

Participants were also chosen using theoretical sampling, one of 16 different purposeful sampling strategies described by Patton (2002). According to Glesne, (2011)“Theoretical sampling selects cases, people, events, activities, etc. through evolving theoretical constructs in one’s research” (p. 45). The theoretical premise of this study was the significant life experience theoretical framework, discussed in the previous chapter. All of the participants have completed an immersive study abroad experience. An immersive study abroad experience is defined for the foundation of this study as an experience abroad lasting at least four weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks). Six of the participants completed an internship abroad and four of them completed a semester exchange abroad. Thus, two focus groups were established, one
with participants who had completed an internship abroad and one with participants who had completed a semester exchange abroad. The researcher chose to divide the two groups of participants in order to compare the data collected by the two different immersive experiences.

After OGP faculty selected the participants, they were contacted through email by one of the OGP faculty members that worked with each participant personally to organize their immersive experience. The OGP faculty member contacted these individuals instead of the researcher to gain trust and rapport with participants as well as explain the purpose of the study and to ask for their voluntary participation. The researcher and an OGP faculty member established dates and times for the two focus groups. Participants were to email the OGP faculty member with their decision to accept or decline the invitation to participate in a focus group. The email used to recruit participants for this study can be found in Appendix A.

**Description of Participants**

**Focus Group Number 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel)**

A total of ten people were selected to participate in two separate focus groups for this study. Six of the participants completed an internship abroad, traveling by themselves and the remaining four of the participants completed a semester exchange abroad, traveling with other UGA students. The group of students who completed internships abroad participated in the first focus group Monday, January 28, 2013, and the remaining four students who completed semester exchange programs abroad participated in the second focus group held Tuesday, February 5, 2013. The first focus
group lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes and the second focus group lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Descriptions of the participants can be found below beginning with the first focus group students and ending with the last.

Participant A had completed both an exchange and internship study abroad program. This participant has spent the past two consecutive summers abroad. One summer the participant spent six weeks abroad completing a semester exchange in Costa Rica through the Warnell School of Forestry at UGA and another participant completed a ten-week internship abroad in Germany working with a local veterinarian. Having completed both an international exchange and internship abroad, this participant was able to provide a wealth of information regarding the effects of both experiences.

Participant B completed the longest internship aboard lasting one-year in the island country of New Zealand. This participant was completing an organic agriculture internship as well as a horticultural amenity internship in Christ Church Botanical Gardens. This participant would move to a new farm every two to three weeks for a five-month period of time. The remaining three to four months this individual spent in New Zealand they traveled around having a “look around.”

Participant C is originally from China and completing their bachelor’s degree in agricultural economics at UGA. This participant completed an international agribusiness internship in Taipei, Taiwan that lasted forty-two days. The details of this internship required this participant to work with an agro tourism evaluation team directed by this government’s department of state. This participant also worked under the direction of a professor at National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. Under this professor’s direction, Participant C worked with her assisting local fruit and rice farmers.
Participant D spent eight weeks in Ecuador completing an international internship. In Ecuador, this participant lived with an older man and woman on their chocolate farm. Participant D went to Ecuador with the original intention of working with people in the community, assisting with humanitarian needs but instead worked predominately on a chocolate farm and learned much about alternative agricultural practices. This participant hopes to complete another stint abroad but in more of a humanitarian needs assisting capacity.

Participant E completed a ten-week internship abroad in Spain working in an agricultural research lab, specifically working in the area of animal health and parasites. This participate had one of the most interesting stories because their experience was the most difficult of all students who participated in both focus groups. This participant reported that they felt very lonely because there was no one else their age that participated in this experience with them or that was there in Spain during the time they was abroad. This participate said they would never complete another experience such as this and would not recommend it anyone else as well.

Finally, the last participate in the first focus group is Participant F. This individual has completed many study abroad experiences. The experience they specifically discussed was the experience had in Greece where the participant completed two weeks of an internship working in vineyards and green houses and then six weeks working with agro-tourism in Greece. This participate could had a very unique story because of their plethora of experience with study abroad.
Focus Group 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel)

The second focus group contained a total of four participants who completed semester exchange programs abroad. A semester exchange abroad allows students to travel with other students from their home school and live abroad for an entire academic semester. While abroad, students enroll in courses at a foreign institution and experience what life is like for students in that specific university.

Participant A in focus group 2 completed a semester exchange in Brazil. While in Brazil this participant took courses at an international academic institution as well as lived with other students from the university. The participants completely immersed themself in the Brazilian culture and made the decision to complete her studies at another foreign institution instead of returning to UGA. However, this person’s plans changed and returned to UGA to complete their studies with a heavy emphasis in international agricultural elements of their degree program.

Participant B completed a semester exchange in Vienna, Austria. This participant traveled with other students from UGA, lived and studied with them and other Austrian students. This participant chose to complete this experience because they wanted to experience something completely different from what they were used to. This participant experienced self-proclaimed self-growth and would recommend this type of experience to all undergraduate students.

Participant C completed a semester exchange program in Zurich, Switzerland. This participant expressed during the focus group that they really wanted to complete a study abroad experience before graduating from UGA but didn’t really know what type of research they wanted to complete while abroad. This participant thought about
completing a May-mester in Cortona, Italy but decided to study abroad in Zurich because of the financial incentives. This participant is now applying for graduate schools and believes that this experience has set them apart from other potential graduate school applicants.

Participant D also completed a semester exchange in Vienna, Austria. Participant B and D traveled together to complete their semester exchange program and both had very different reactions/experiences while abroad. Participant D had an easier time adjusting to all of the changes living abroad can present because of her previous travel experience through Europe. Both Participant B and D originally wanted to travel abroad in a Spanish speaking country but ultimately both chose to travel abroad in Vienna because of the financial incentives. Their stories were very interesting; they both unanimously agreed that they would always consider each other family.

Data Collection

The first step in the data collection process was to create an interview guide that would be used for facilitating both focus groups. The questions focused on identifying what about the study abroad experience made it so unique and allowed students to develop or refine soft skills. The questions were open-ended based on the researcher’s research question and gaps within current research. These questions gave participants the opportunity to express their feelings about their study abroad experience from the coordination to completion of it. After the initial interview guide was completed and reviewed by the researcher and her committee, it was sent to the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB).
Focus Group Guide

1. Tell me about your decision to study abroad. Describe some of the factors that influenced this, including, for example, location of study abroad trip, any individuals, financial incentives, and future career goals.

2. These days, it has been said that “soft skills” are desired among college graduates seeking employment. Given your background and future career goals, how would you define a “soft skill?”

3. Here is a list of soft skills and attributes required by employers in a recent study. Before going on your study abroad trip, how good were you at using these soft skills?

4. Are these skills necessary to complete a study abroad? Which skills would you consider to be most essential?

5. During your study abroad trip, describe an experience where you used these or other soft skills. Let’s be as specific as possible with the skill(s) and how used.

6. Once returning from your study abroad trip, how have you used these or other soft skills? Are you better at using these skills because of your study abroad experience?

7. What about your study abroad experience was so unique and contributed to this development (if anything)?

8. A recent study reported, “Foreign language capabilities and study abroad experience were not perceived to be critical skill needs among employers.” How would you respond to this?
9. Reflecting on your study abroad experience, how did your education here prepare (or not prepare) you for this experience? What recommendations might you make to better prepare students for study abroad?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share? Do you have any questions for me?

For the study, two focus groups were conducted with students who completed both semester internships and semester exchange programs abroad. The focus groups lasted between one hour and fifteen minutes to one and thirty-five minutes and were audio recorded on multiple technology devices for later verbatim transcription. The focus group questions gave the researcher the opportunity to learn about how students felt about their study abroad experience as a whole. The researcher used the focus group questions as a guide for the focus groups but also used other probing questions based on the participant’s responses to the initial questions.

The researcher made an effort to develop rapport with the participants during the focus group sessions. Before the focus groups, the Study Abroad Recruitment Coordinator sent an email for CAES requesting the presence of the students to participate in the study. The initial email gave participants an understanding of the study and a sense of importance because they were “chosen” to participate by the researcher and study abroad coordinator. The researcher chose to wear clothes similar to that of the students to make them feel more comfortable and provide a more casual atmosphere. The researcher also chose to purchase food and gifts for the participants to make them feel that their time was of the up most importance and also to show appreciation for their time. The
researcher also went over specifics of how a focus group typically is conduced and also reviewed and explained the consent form with each participant. The focus groups were also held in the Hoke Smith Building on UGA’s campus. Participants of the focus groups were familiar with the building and met with the study abroad recruitment coordinator on numerous occasions to discuss their study abroad experiences. The consent form can be found in the Appendix B.

Data Analysis

After each focus group was transcribed verbatim, the researcher used domain analysis to analyze all of the focus group data. Themes were discovered in both data sets, they were color-coded and then compared across each focus group. Key domains were identified and interpreted. Two peer reviewers were selected to analyze the data and their findings were compared to the researcher’s. The researcher also used peer reviewers to assist in the analysis of the data. All of the reviewers analyzed the data exactly as the researcher. After all the phases of data analysis were completed, the researcher used member checks to provide additional validity to the study by sharing key domains with the participants for their feedback.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. After conducting two focus groups; one with students who completed a semester internship abroad, and one with students who completed a semester exchange abroad, domains (themes) emerged that explained the significance of this experience and its role in developing soft skills in undergraduate students. These themes were also used to help understand why an immersive study abroad experience is so unique for College of Agriculture undergraduate students.

This chapter presents the domains that emerged from each focus group. After domains for each focus group were assembled, the researcher then compared the domains from the two focus groups in search of common domains and differences. Raw quotes are presented to extrapolate on the domains and to provide a context for understanding.

Focus Group Number 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel) n=6

The first focus group was conducted with six students who completed a semester internship abroad. Students who completed this immersive study abroad experience were abroad for a period of at least 6 weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks). These students traveled to a foreign location by themselves and worked with individuals from the country in which they completed their study abroad experience.
The first question students were asked in this focus group was for the researcher to have a better understanding of why College of Agriculture undergraduate students chose to complete an immersive study abroad experience and the influential factors that helped sway their decision. The following domains below emerged from the data regarding their decision process in choosing to complete an immersive study abroad experience. In accordance with domain analysis, domains are presented in order of their occurrence in the raw data.

Mentorship

When the researcher asked participants to describe their decision to study abroad and the influential factors of their decision, two participants mentioned mentorship as their key influential factor for completing an immersive study abroad experience. These participants were mentored and encouraged to study abroad by the same professor at UGA, Dr. Paul Thomas of the Horticulture Department within the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES). Participants A and B (PA and PB) said:

PA: “I guess speaking of Carolina, it was well her apart but primary it was my honors program mentor Dr. Thomas was just pushing going abroad, like you were saying there’s no other time you can that you’ll have the time in your life to do it take advantage of this opportunity. I never looked into it because of the financial reasons and he was like, gave me a to do list, I want you to come back with a certain list of scholarships next time I see you and then you know like step by step he did check points for me and then handed me off to Carolina to explore more and um yea, that was pretty much the push for me.”

PB: “That’s pretty much the exact same thing for me, Dr. Thomas…always my advisor in the horticulture department and he has a really good working relationship with Carolina and then he knows a lot about the opportunities to study abroad and how much it can enhance your um education at this time in our lives so he kinda pushed me as well and I also never looked into it before because I didn’t think that I’d ever have the money to do it but here’s so much funding out there and um, yeah it was definitely beneficial to me.”
Mentorship played a significant role in the decision process for College of Agriculture undergraduate students to complete an immersive study abroad experience.

**Internal Motivation**

Another participant described their desire to study abroad as something they’ve always wanted to do, deeply internally motivated. Participant F (PF) said this about their decision to study abroad and the factors that influenced their decision:

PF: “I wanted to study abroad since like high school, I guess forever I wanted to travel that was what I wanted to do. That’s even why I picked my major because I wanted to think of something I was good at and that would allow me to travel the world, so that’s why I like agriculture because it’s all transferable skills. I met with Carolina as a freshman probably a few weeks I was already here and cause I met with her during orientation and I met with her a lot and all the programs that I wanted to do failed like Mexico that via didn’t go through, Thailand had riots the year I wanted to go, Brussels was canceled the year I wanted to go, all my trips were being canceled just left and right and it was awful but finally the France program worked by coincidence. Carolina didn’t even tell me about it, I went to the poultry science meeting and found out about it and then the Greece one, I found out about it the year before cause Carolina told me about it and then the year of they tripled the price, but I mean I wanted to do it since I was like, you know when you’re so young you’ll like, I’ll make it happen, so it wasn’t I mean the financials didn’t deter me so I was just like we’ll make it happen one way or another, it’s gonna happen.”

To the researcher, it is evident that PF was deeply internally motivated to complete an immersive study abroad experience despite any challenges they were faced with.

**Personal Reasons**

Participant C (PC) had personal reasons regarding their decision to complete an immersive study abroad experience. This particular participant is originally from China and said that they have studied abroad all of their life. This participant’s reason for studying abroad was one of the most unique reasons for completing a study abroad
program. PC said this about their decision to study abroad and the factors that influenced their decision:

PC: “It’s very different for me why I study abroad because I study abroad all the time. I come from China this is study abroad for me, but I chose to go to Taiwan firstly, um it might be strange that I come from China and then I went to Taiwan but it’s important for me to go there because we never went to Taiwan because of the disagreement between Taiwan and China. So we don’t get to know many people from Taiwan so when I heard of this trip I decided to go…but I realize how different it is ah the lifestyle has the way the farming works how different it is between China and Taiwan and of course between Taiwan and the United States it’s very different.”

The researcher found this motivational factor for studying abroad most endearing and can summarize that there are many reasons why participants choose to study abroad.

Humanitarian Assistance

Participant D (PD) chose to study abroad because of their desire to assist in global humanitarian work. This participant is a self-proclaimed “people person” and one-day wants to involve themself in international humanitarian aid projects. PD said this about their decision to study abroad:

PD: “Well I originally wanted to do a study abroad but yet I was also interested in kinda like the international agriculture development kinda peace corp type humanitarian type thing so um but I never wanted to take the language classes, you know it’s not exactly required for the College of Agriculture so I was like I’m not gonna take it, it’s gonna be hard. I went and I took it and it was fine but so I found a place where this lady is trying to help the community also incorporating more sustainable agriculture practices and stuff but then when I got there it turned out to be so much more like production and I’m not, I mean they’re using sustainable practices but there was not very much involvement in the community which was ah was a really big disappointment you know what I mean cause I’d gone into it because of like more of the people aspect than the agriculture and then I was like three people including myself on this farm for like and ah go to town like once a week, I mean sorta I guess that was a tangent but like ah getting into it for like the people aspect.”

The researcher found that PD was motivated to travel abroad because they wanted to involve themselves in humanitarian assistance.
Acquisition of a Foreign Language

The last participant in the first focus group, Participant E (PE), traveled to Spain to complete their international internship and acquire Spanish as a learned foreign language.

PE said the following about their experience abroad:

PE: “Um I wanted to go abroad to obtain fluency in another language and that failed. But um that’s mostly because everybody knows and could speak English and they were like just stop.”

Through all of the various answers provided for this question, the researcher can conclude that motivational factors influencing participants to complete an immersive study abroad experience, are typically unique for each individual. Each of the domains presented above emerged differently across the participants as factors influencing their decision to complete an immersive experience abroad.

The next question the researcher asked participants was to define what they believe are soft skills given their background and future career goals. The participants in the first focus were all nonsocial science majors and had never heard of a soft skill before and could not define what they believed to be soft skills. After verbally giving participants examples of soft skills they were then able to formulate their own definition of a soft skill. A total of four domains emerged from the data regarding each participant’s perception of necessary soft skills for their future career goals. The domain that occurred the most was cultural awareness, with the remaining in descending order of occurrence, critical thinking/problem solving, personal growth, and people skills.
Cultural Awareness

In the domain of cultural awareness, Participant C (PC) said the following about their development of cultural awareness through their immersive study abroad experience.

PC: “I didn’t have any communication problem when I go to Taiwan because we speak the same language but because we speak the same language however there is communication problem cause when you speak the same thing you use different terms, especially if you are from different regions of that language speaking area. I left China when I was fifteen years old then I studied in Singapore, then came to the United States and then went back to Taiwan so I have been to three different countries or regions where Chinese is spoken but when we talk about the same thing we have different terms and we approach the same um problem we have different attitudes towards it. For example I give you example when I went to Taiwan in front of the library I saw flowers. They have flower rings they made a ring with flowers I thought somebody died because in China this is a ritual when somebody dies you give a flower ring but I went to ask my professor she say oh that’s for our anniversary I did the library was founded like twenty years ago so it was just very different when in China you put a flower ring in front of someone’s house they’re not going to be happy. So I guess it’s not only oral communication of languages it’s how we approach things all even, even the same language is spoken but the way we approach things is different.”

Other participants also noticed through their immersive study abroad experience that communication, both verbal and nonverbal, was culturally relative. Even though some participants spoke the native tongue in the country in which they were studying, many of the participants noticed that the same word or nonverbal cue could potentially be offensive in another culture. Participant F (PF), a participant who fluently speaks Spanish, said this about their experience speaking Spanish in a Spanish speaking culture different from their own:

PF: “There’s a big difference in being bilingual and bicultural. That’s a culture thing they’re so different.”

PF: “I mean cause the same thing you mentioned I mean, I’ve noticed before I ever traveled though like just I mean all of south America, Central America, and Spain um we all speak Spanish but when you tell somebody something that is ok in Columbia to a Mexican and they get insulted you’re like whoa whoa what happened? I think I got lost there or like for example I went to in France I asked someone I’m like oh it was Spanish lady so I asked her where are the bathrooms, where are the bathrooms the way I would
normally asked and she just like she changed the word like what are you talking about? And she’s like that’s what a bathroom is and I was like no it’s not but anyways or I knew it was weird cause I mean I’m like I know we’re speaking the same language but what are you talking about? It’s more frustrating when I feel like they understand you and they’re just saying just resaying what you’re saying so like you know what I mean? Like it’s like I know you understand me just…”

The researcher can conclude that these participants experienced cultural awareness first-hand. Even though these participants spoke the same language as those in the country in which these were studying, there are significant culturally differences and communication cues learned when completing an immersive study abroad experience.

**Personal Growth**

Personal growth was a major development students experienced through their study abroad program. Many students expressed how much they learned about themselves, specifically their personality traits, desires for future career goals, and the environments they need in order to be successful and thrive in both their personal and professional lives. Participants had the following to say about how they grew personally through their immersive study aboard experience:

PD: “Yeah or something like that and so I think um study abroad definitely helped me learn more about myself and like um I guess what qualities I have like what environments I’d need to be successful.”

PA: “I mean I guess it’s like what you were saying with studying abroad it’s kinda that I think you develop them (soft skills) once you step outside that comfort zone. Here at the University, we learn things but it’s always in I mean we have labs and things but it’s usually in a lecture kinda setting and then I mean depending on what type of studying abroad you do um but comparing the two that I went on one with my internship I, it was really just me and um the vet and then his three assistants and then we’d visit farms so it like you were saying I was the youngest one there wasn’t much of that one on one communication I mean we met farmers and everything and there was a lot of um I don’t know speaking of different types of communication I guess you can develop them in different ways but from yeah studying abroad it really helped with that to get you outside of that, to develop soft skills.”
Through this data, the researcher can conclude that participants grew personally through their experience abroad by themselves.

**Critical Thinking/Problem Solving**

The next most occurring domain within this question was critical thinking/problem solving skills. Participants expressed their opinion on their development and usage of this specific skill in the first focus group discussion. Participants had the following to report about the soft skill critical thinking/problem solving:

PB: “Thinking about how to approach a problem um when dealing with other people maybe thinking about how they might respond to the way that you use your words or the way that your body language appears maybe or yea maybe. Yeah um you said something about time management as well did you and critical thinking that’s something I um I learned a lot about on my study abroad as well cause I was left alone to work quite often and if I had a problem you know was it gonna be you know walk all the way across however far and find them or was I gonna try to really think about you know how would they want me to work this out for myself and, and um whatever decision I make how will that affect later days um and stuff like that. So I guess I didn’t really know what a soft skill was before I came tonight I hadn’t heard it phrased that way but I do understand what you’re saying.”

**People Skills**

The last domain that emerged from this question was the development of people skills, learning how to handle people of different cultures and beliefs. One participant was very interested in working within the humanitarian aspect of study abroad. PF said this about their experience with people skills:

PF: “I think it’s more humanitarian I guess it’s just people to people that’s all it is it’s working with people communication with people, dealing with people.”
In the third question, the researcher gave the participants a list of soft skills that are considered desirable among employers for recent graduates to have upon graduation (Brooks, Flanders, Jones, Kane, McKissick, & Shepherd, 2008). The researcher then asked participants how good they were at using these soft skills before completing their immersive study abroad experience. The researcher wanted to assess their ability to practice, or not practice, these skills before completing their study abroad experience. Answers provided by participants revealed students did practice these soft skills during their study abroad experience (but may not have been aware that the skills were in fact “soft skills”). Five domains emerged from the data concerning the usage of soft skills by participants before and during their study abroad experience.

**Self-Management**

Self-management was the most reoccurring soft skill discussed by participants. In the data below, participants discuss scenarios in which they used the soft skill self-management. Participants said the following about their usage of self-management:

PD: “I think the one that stuck out to me was self-management skills. I got really sick while I was there I got dysentery it’s terrible like Oregon Trail kinda stuff, I felt like I was on the Oregon Trail. Just trying to like and I’m a terrible sick person so just, oh my gosh I’m gonna die, like super dramatic, so just being in a foreign country and being sick and I guess still trying to complete your internship you know cause I ended up being sick for like four weeks and lost a lot of weight and it’s so you know what I’m saying, that was what stuck out to me so now if the situation comes up or if I’m sick or I’m tired I’m like well at least it’s not as bad as that and so you can be like oh I can do this.”

PC: “Uh I can talk about self management cause when I was in Taiwan my professor didn’t give me a very specific time table when to get to her office when did I leave so sometimes I will I stayed up late I couldn’t get up early I would try my best to try and get up at nine o’clock in the morning I went there at about ten, she didn’t notice though but at the end of my internship there one of the one of her assistants told me this professor it’s really good, she didn’t really care about how much time did you spend in the office and..."
my professor was actually amazed that I didn’t give him anything to do why is he coming so early I said ah I thought it was necessary to come on time and be I never left before three o’clock in the afternoon but she always told me ah you can go swim because they have student pool and I bought a season pass you should go swim. You should really go swim. I try my best to stay there but it ah it helps though cause sometimes when she suddenly have something she couldn’t reach me because I didn’t have a cell phone so she always said it’s good that you stick to your time table that you stay from a least from ten to three with without a break I mean what if we really need you sometimes and we couldn’t find you and self management I guess is one of the thing that the employer maybe they will not enforce it but they still value it if you stick to your own discipline.”

PA: “I mean I guess we were talking about self management and like taking initiative when I was in Germany um it was pretty much I just followed around Dr. Dire on his day to day it was seven till like nine, but other than just coming along with him it was kinda up to me however much I wanted to learn.”

After reading through the data, the researcher is able to understand the critical role self-management skills played for participants completing their international internship abroad.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness was another soft skill participants gained through completing their immersive study abroad experience. Many of the participants reported instances in which they learned and used this skill throughout their immersive experience. The participants said the following about their development of cultural awareness:

PF: “And it’s cultural too cause I remember ah when I went to France we had a dinner with some other students they were serving and stuff but like I saw on the board that it said wine was six euros and I was like that’s like twelve dollars for a glass of win so they’re like oh you want one and I was like wait, I’m gonna pay extra I don’t understand how this is working and they’re like if you want you take if you don’t you don’t and I was like I’m on a budget I kinda need to know ah yeah and they’re like no if you they just repeat and your just like ok, well I’ll just be on the safe side, I won’t have any and then at the end they just split the bill evenly. They just split the bill evenly so I was like I just paid like yeah and I didn’t have any so I was like what? I was upset or like sometimes like I do this with my friends all the time. It’s cool with them like I wanna try multiple things but you don’t wanna buy I mean you can’t eat every multiple means so its like you order one I’ll order another one and we’ll split it half and half. And then I I wen there I
was like oh let’s do that and there’s only one student who would do it with me like the other students were like nope, no I kinda want to have my own I was just like ahhhh! Then you only get to try one thing. But um luckily she was there she was really nice she’s the one I traveled with when we went to the weekend in Spain but it was frustrating cause it’s like why is nobody understand like the concept of a budget was like foreign to them they’re like oh we’re in France just....”

PF: “And like but other people are like oh my, which is also cultural I mean Greek in Greek cultural too like they would they’d order a bunch of appetizers and we’d all just eat from them where instead of everyone having their own mean and like this mine.”

After reading the data provided above, it is clear to the researcher that participants did become more culturally aware through completing their immersive study abroad experience.

Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
Another skill used and learned by many of the participants was critical thinking/problem solving. Participants said the following about how they further developed and used this skill while abroad:

PE: “So we had to figure out how to get to our hotel how to navigate this city where you don’t know the language at all and then of course it’s the French so no one wants to speak English to you. Ah we ended up thinking on our feet we went to the most expensive hotel we could find and we walked in because we knew Americans were gonna be there so we ended up asking them if they knew where a McDonald’s was and they gave us a map, a directions a number to call just in case we got lost and stuff so that was really a good idea that we came up with.”

PE: “But it’s fun cause all we had was we got to the country and we had a place to stay and then from we had like three days and we just made it up from there.”

PA: “Ha sorry um the oh when you have a trip that like you’re saying you’re trying to find something for yourself to do or when they are all when you’re kinda on your own having to plan it out and I guess that that initiative vs. a completely planned out study abroad trip.”

PA: “Then I was in Costa Rica it was like (snapping) everyday like we had a lecture everyday at a certain time we had lunch at a certain time and we had to get up at a certain time and I think we had we had those few free days for research and stuff um and a day here or there but I kinda didn’t I mean I had to plan an exploring around when we had
lectures and stuff but it was pretty much planned out for me and then I the students so there’s students to compare it to and to just oh hey we can go out for tonight but then in Germany it was very independent and I guess kinda just dropped into that real world situation.”

It is clear to the researcher that participants learned the soft skill critical thinking/problem solving while completing their immersive study abroad experience. The examples above, provided by the raw data, paint vivid pictures to the researcher how they developed and used this skill while abroad.

Initiative

The next soft skill used by participants was initiative. Similar to the results of critical thinking/problem solving, students who completed semester internships abroad also gained in this area more so than students who completed semester exchanges abroad.

Participants reported the following about their experience with the soft skill initiative:

PD: “I don’t know about initiative but sometimes when you have a problem but nobody knows you have this problem I think sometimes you have to step up and tell them that you have this problem for example when I was in Taiwan we didn’t anticipate this problem they didn’t have a school bus and da da da dining halls close down during vacations so for the forty-two days I was there I didn’t have any meals served in dining hall and I still stayed in the student hall it took me um it will take me forty-five minutes to walk from my dorm to the um the gate of the school where they have all these vendors but it’s a up hill so I had to walk two miles everyday to the vendors to buy food so I couldn’t take it anymore two miles one way it’s two miles it’s four miles everyday. Whatever I eat I couldn’t make up the energy so I ask my professor for help I say I need a bicycle but then I forgot about that’s up hill. So everyday I really have to burn a lot of calories to ride a bicycle up hill after I eat I just sit on the bicycle the bicycle would roll down hill or I didn’t have to use the pedal once it would just roll down hill all the way. And sometimes, well I mean being Chinese there when I have problems its easy for me to communicate with them but I think, I couldn’t remember whether it was Carolina or Dr. Kanemasu said that its lucky for me being Chinese studying in Taiwan or if its an American who speak ah who speaks little Chinese studying in Taiwan or China you have big problem communicating with people especially no I mean if you have problems when you are working or studying you can talk to the professors because they speak English but if you have problem lets say if I am sitting if I didn’t speak Chinese and it was
weekends so only maybe the custodians or maybe the ah um the hostel stuff but there it’s gonna be very difficult to communicate.”

PA: “I kinda gave myself a schedule of like making sure or then I guess I guess I got a schedule of waking up early in the morning to get my coffee then reading the newspaper with my dictionary and then um using my break midday to do something other than just sleep cause I was exhausted but um like going then explore the city and then like on a bike and then like coming back um but yeah it’s just so taking that initiative to make sure to try to learn as much as I could for the time I was there.”

This data gives the researcher a clear understanding of the necessity of initiative and also how participants learned to take initiative in different situations while completing their internship abroad.

Teambuilding Skills

The last soft skill mentioned by participants was teambuilding skills. Participants briefly talked about the usage of teambuilding skills, perhaps because the individuals who participated in this focus group completed a semester internship aboard and often traveled by themselves. Participants discussed the following regarding teambuilding skills:

PA: “Cause I was gonna say yeah with like team building skills I guess when I was in Costa Rica with a lot of other UGA undergrads and then there were also vet school students just an interesting dynamic but um but yeah we had to do like mini research projects and so we were just split up and kinda set free cause we had three or four days to collect our data and stuff and so we had that aspect if you go on study abroad you’re with other students and not by yourself and there’s def. team building skills there.”

The next question participants were asked was to describe their ability to use these soft skills after completing a study abroad experience and if they were better at using these skills because of their experience abroad. The following three domains arose
from the data: initiative to be extroverted, practiced soft skills more, and did not practice soft skills more.

**Initiative to be Extroverted**

The domain that occurred the most from the data was initiative to be extroverted. Participants reported the following about having to take initiative to become more extroverted in scenarios presented abroad below:

PA: “I guess a little bit more extroverted yeah um even with speaking with other students because you had to have such a problem in another country or because you are like getting outside of your comfort zone kinda thing and even meeting new students and um so then I you know coming back to Athens and then there’s still students that I went on my study abroad here so then its I don’t know, you’re kinda forced to get to know them.”

PE: “Yeah cause we went to a hostile in Barcelona and it happened to be that everybody there was an American college student so everyone was like oh my gosh you’re from the U.S. I’m from Boston I’m from California and it was like within meeting them in five minutes it’s like let’s go down to the city right now or let’s go we’re going biking tomorrow, let’s go let’s go let’s go beach and it was had it not been in a foreign place we prolly wouldn’t have said hi. So I guess you learn to take more initiative.”

PA: “Well I guess kinda not really with the soft skills but with languages and things like I my mom speaks fluent German she’s from Germany and I learned German I guess slightly when I was growing up and then I took a class here but there was never that push to like actually go out there and try to tell stories in the language other than just that getting by and it took me a while through being in Germany to finally like really push myself to do that and now that I’m back in the U.S. and it’s a little bit easier to I mean I guess that they say you don’t really learn a langue until you’re forced to say it so I’m I guess I know more conversational terms now and that helps but I think also just that push to not worry about not saying things wrong cause I would also be worried about that in front of my mom cause it’s like I don’t know she expects me to find it but then um yeah it’s easier for me to try…”

In the data above, participants describe how they were pushed out of their comfort zones and made to be more extroverted in their personalities in order to thrive while abroad.
Practiced Soft Skills More

The next domain discussed in the data was that participants did practice soft skills more after returning abroad. Participants said the following about using soft skills more after returning from their study abroad trip:

PF: “I feel like you might practice them more but I don’t think it’s you learn them per say cause I t just feel like you’re put in a different world, yes there’s transferable skills, but you just ah I don’t wanna so you develop it cause I feel like everyone has these skills in high school I mean I don’t know, I think they’re pretty basic.”

The researcher found the quote above provided by PF to be most interesting. The researcher can summarize by the statement provided above that an immersive experience abroad does require students to practice these skills in order to complete it successfully.

The researcher also asked participants to describe what made their study abroad experience so unique and contributed to the development of their soft skills. The domain below is entitled significant experience. The researcher chose this title because of its correlation with the theoretical premise of this study. Participant F (PF) says the following below made their experience significant.

Significant Experience

Participant C (PC) was the only participant who had one specific example they believed made this experience so unique for them. PC said the following about their experience and what made it so unique:

PC: “When I was in Taiwan we went to a tour that the professor arranged for us she had two or her assistants graduate assistants to bring me and a student from El Salvador and the students cousins who are form California who went out to eat pigs feet so it’s well we couldn’t I could communicate with both groups but they communicate with each other so we were sitting at a round table and we were very silent we were sitting there and the
American friends they were staring at the pigs feet they didn’t know how to start and there were pigs intestines on the table that was served as an item and it was dead silent so I had to say you know what I would facilitate the conversation I will translate for the Taiwanese students and I would talk back to the ah El Salvador students and their California cousins. I never spoke a single sentence of Spanish when I talk to the student from El Salvador I try to use every single Spanish phrase I could use all the things I learned from La Fiesta when I order things when I call the waitress to come I say Senora could you I want this and that all the things I could say in Spanish was Gracias cause I will use every single thing I could try to get them to communicate with each other then I find more common grounds among the two groups they all like basketball and so did I so we got the conversation started.”

This participant critically thought to take language skills they learned in a local Mexican restaurant in order to generate conversation between the two groups of people. The researcher found this example to be an excellent representation of how an immersive study abroad experience can be so “special” and contribute to the development of soft skills.

The last question the researcher asked participants was regarding a study conducted at the University of Georgia. The recent study reported, “Foreign language capabilities and study abroad experiences were not perceived to be critical skills needed among employers,” (Brooks, Flanders, Jones, Kane, McKissick, & Shepherd, 2008, p. 5). Participants were then asked to respond to the findings of this study. Some of the participants agreed to the findings of the study on a conditional basis or were indifferent to the findings of the study. Some of the responses by participants even discussed negative feedback they received from friends and teachers who disapproved of their decision to study abroad. Other participants were in complete disagreement with the findings of this study and believed that immersive study abroad is a valuable learning experience.
Indifferent to the Results Study Abroad is May Not be as Beneficial Depending on Future Career Paths

Much to the researcher’s surprise, some of the focus group participants were indifferent to the study’s findings and agreed with them on a conditional basis. Participant’s said the following below about the study’s findings:

PB: “Maybe it also depends on how um active your employer is in the global community and how much they value business interactions with other countries and how adapt you are at communicating using other languages or even just other culture and that kind of stuff.”

PD: “I think there’s a big difference though in the internship that we have taken than say the study abroad like here study abroad class been apart of where we just did more just like watching and not like the actual involvement and so I think that the skills we learned from being involved where as like we’re just like standing on some trail in the middle of the rainforest oh yeah there’s a bird and there’s a tree, you know that I don’t think that’s no where near as valuable, I mean, yeah the culture that’s cool and you do gain something from it but as far as like these skills are concerned they don’t result from passivity.”

PE: “I will admit some study abroad (programs) are vacations.”

PA: “I def. agree there is that stereotype that oh you got to go abroad there’s also that stereotype towards people who do go abroad they’re like oh you know your parents paid for you to go to Europe every year all the time you’re just getting to go on vacation over the summer and it looks good on your resume it’s like I wish. It depends on your program and what you’re doing yeah I wish that my parents paid everything. Yeah I mean it’s situational.”

PB: “Maybe that’s also commentary on the sorta national view that maybe people still view study abroad and leaving the country as to expensive for the common college student and so it’s like the would value an internship because most can get an internship in the country and that’s a practical work experience and maybe the majority of people and employers still view study abroad as not applicable to the majority of students so they would say well we’re gonna we’re gonna put more value on a practical work experience within the country than putting more um value on a study abroad experience because maybe it isn’t for everyone maybe every one can’t do it.”

The statements given by participants show that they do have an understanding of this study’s particular findings and understand how some individuals may perceive study
abroad to be a vacation for students and not as beneficial as an internship that can be completed in the United States.

Lack of Encouragement to Study Abroad

Some participants discussed the negative feedback and discouragement they received from friends and teachers before they completed their study abroad. Participants E and F discuss these reactions in the following below:

PE: “I had some conspiracy theories’ I had an econ teacher in high school and his little tangent was how a lot of the stuff that we say is maybe is to expensive to study aboard not really what kinda taught since we were younger for school nothing that we kinda just stay, and you don’t get the opportunity until you’re like in college and by then well people are like well I’m actually pretty fine living here after eighteen years had the beach down here the mountains over there they don’t really everything that would be in Europe they have so they don’t really wanna leave or not Europe but you know around the world so it’s a lot of because we’re not exposed at a younger age by the time we get to an age we are able to leave we don’t want to. I have a lot of friends who are like I don’t really want to I don’t have a desire to. Which was shocking to me but it’s whatever.”

PF: “But I felt the same back lash from my department head when I was trying to get credits transferred I just was so frustrated with how it’s a UGA program it’s super easy it’s a breeze like it’s like ahhhhhh it feels really good to just sign up and go if it’s not a UGA program it’s a hassle and a half it’s just awful my department head said that too like we just view it like you know if the department head he’s from Zamorano to he’s not American either so he’s foreign it’s like obviously you understand like cause he’s form Zamorano anyways but he viewed more diversification that’s why the process was such a hassle because if the college and the university thinks it’s so important and they recommend everyone to do it why do they make the process so burdensome for anything that’s not a UGA program I mean we’re partner schools of the exchange program not something completely random and weird and different but so I felt that even with even though it’s an educated person."

Through the raw data provided above, the researcher can summarize that some participants received little to no encouragement to participate in an immersive study abroad experience from individuals of importance to them.
Disagreed with the Results Study Abroad is a Beneficial Learning Experience

The majority of participants overwhelming disagreed with the findings of this study.

Most participants found their study abroad experience to be extremely beneficial. Below participants expressed their strong opinions against the findings of this study:

PB: “I think it’s very valuable, I think it certainly changed my life and opened some doors that wouldn’t have been open before. I’m very glad I did an internship abroad and I would think an internship is very important but I also think a study abroad experience is quite valuable for an employee…definitely.”

PF: “I agree I think that I don’t think there’s a single job now that really isn’t dependent on something global I mean we’re globalization like we’re global now there is now with the world wide web and with everything so there really is no excuse not to be a global citizen as well and understand these different cultures I mean I don’t understand why you’d want to limit yourself anyway. I mean there’s no there’s no loss.”

PB: “There’s no loss certainly just something to be gained by traveling abroad.”

PA: “Especially if even if the practices are very different I mean that’s in itself even if you’re not learning exactly how it would be practiced in the U.S. you’re being able to compare that and contrast it and bring back what you learned how they do it differently in another country…”

PA: “I mean we were talking about earlier with being in an internship you’re more by yourself and study abroad you have that you usually have that group of other students.”

PF: “So you saying I don’t think study abroad is important you’re saying I don’t think trying to learn about other cultures is important I mean it’s a slap in the face I think it’s insulting and rude and ignorant. But to me all it says is that you’re not important, that’s what it says I mean it’s not important for me to learn about you.”

PF: “Especially in agriculture we talked about all of these transferable skills and like they were using John Deere tractors over there so obviously it’s important to the economy and just economy policy wise one of the most valuable things I learned was how the European system helped farmers and how they’re markets are completely different how they market certain things how they perceive food was completely different and why what’s wrong with eating something completely different that’s the only way to the path of innovation is doing things differently but there’s the same abuse the same I don’t know thing you’ll achieve the same results.”

PD: “Exactly that’s what I’m saying, your level of involvement (in study abroad programs) determines your level of developing these skills.”
PA: “So yeah I guess that’s based on the thinking the way we do things in the U.S. is the only way to do it that it’s the best way we’ve been farming like this for so long why would we want to go and see what other countries are doing but yeah I mean how else do you know I guess it takes that self reflection um aspect like we actually I can’t I believe I didn’t think about this before we talked about this a lot on our study abroad that it takes you seeing something done differently to actually reflect on the way that you have been doing it and realizing maybe I’m doing it maybe you do decide oh our way is obviously better but a lot of times you realize oh you know they go about this in a completely different way maybe I should be altering my mindset about it.”

After reading through the data provided by participants, it is obvious to the researcher that the majority of participants find immersive study abroad experiences to be extremely beneficial.

**Focus Group 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel) \( n=4 \)**

The second focus group consisted of four participants who completed a semester exchange abroad. A semester exchange is an immersive study abroad experience, lasting at least 6 weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks), where students travel with other university students to complete academic courses at a foreign university. The participants in this focus group were asked the same questions as the students who participated in the first focus group. The first focus group lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes and the second focus group lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Like the first focus group, these participants were asked to describe their decision to study abroad and the influential factors that helped them make their decision to participate in an immersive study abroad experience. Three domains emerged from the data including financial incentives, followed by career goals, and the desire to experience something new.
Financial Incentives

Participants said the following about financial incentives regarding their decision to study abroad:

PA: “There’s this really cool grant where anybody that does a full semester exchange um the US Government and the Brazilian Government have an agreement and you get a range of money like I got the least outta everyone and I got 2,000 there were students that got like 5,000 just for doing an exchange it’s not like a competitive thing and then I applied for another scholarship as well so it was a fully funded trip.”

PC: “It came with a 3,000 scholarship which was nice ha and so um that’s why I had no idea about it before I got this email. It was due like 5 days after I got the email so haha I didn’t even tell my mother I’d applied for it and so after I got it haha so I really was not planning on studying abroad before I did.”

PB: “When I found out about BOKU exchange semester and the 5,000 grant that went with it that was kinda my decision to just go with um going to BOKU and going to Europe which I felt would be a good new experience.”

PD: “So I came in and I talked to Carolina about the options to go to ah Spain and I knew that I wanted t go to Europe and then she was like well see (we) don’t really have anything in Spain um but we have this you know hefty grant from FAMU ah where you can go either to France or um Austria and just let me know… so I was kinda like yay cool and then like once I kinda got into the nitty gritty part of it I started to realize the difference between a study abroad and an exchange and um I didn’t know that kinda coming into it the differences but I’m so glad that I ended up doing an exchange and not a study abroad.”

After examining this data, it is obvious that all of the students that participated in the second focus group were influenced to complete their immersive study abroad experience because of financial incentives. Many of the participants wanted to travel other places but because of the overwhelming financial motivations to travel to other universities they chose to complete their semester exchange where the most scholarship money was allocated.
Career Goals

Another domain that emerged from the data was future career goals. Participant A (PA) wanted to travel to Brazil, a leader in sustainable agriculture, to enhance their knowledge on the subject and potential career goals. PA said the following about their future career goals and semester exchange experience:

PA: “I knew that Brazil was a leader in sustainable agriculture um and that was really my passion and I knew that we really don’t have as much of that here in the US and that Brazil would be a good model to look for if I wanted to work in Development.”

PA realized their opportunity to advance their knowledge in sustainable agriculture was in Brazil. PA gives a great description of one reason why participants travel aboard, to examine other “models” and different ways of completing a task from what they are accustomed to doing in the United States.

Experience Something New

The next domain that emerged from the data was the desire to experience something new. Participant B (PB) describes their main motivation for completing a semester exchange program below:

PB: “My main motivation for study abroad I think I just wanted a new experience. I think I was a little bit I think it was a phase of life how but um I just wanted to do something new.”

The researcher is able to summarize that one influential factor for this participant was the incentive to try something new; curiosity drove this participant to step outside of their comfort zone and experience something new.
For the second question, participants were given the statement, “It has been said that soft skills are desired among college graduates seeking employment, and asked given their backgrounds and future career goals, how would you define a soft skill?” To the researcher’s surprise, none of the participants knew what a soft skill was. With that reaction from participants, the researcher then passed participants the list of example soft skills to help them better understand the question (as cited above). After giving participants examples of soft skills, the researcher asked participants if they already had these skills or if they believed their semester exchange helped them learn these skills.

The researcher also asked participants how good they were at using these skills prior to their study abroad experience. Two domains emerged from the data, some participants felt they were good at using these skills before and that study abroad did not prompt any change and other participants felt that study abroad enhanced these skills for them.

**Teambuilding Skills**

The soft skill that reoccurred the most throughout the data for this specific question was teambuilding skills. The quotes below indicate how participants learned teambuilding skills through their immersive study abroad experience:

PD: “Yeah and how they think and um it made me appreciate you know the way that we do it but also just like the other girls that went to UGA as well that was a lot of team work coordinating with each other helping each other leaning on each other we became family because there was no other way to do it and so it was a lot of like yeah teamwork and then self management like getting yourself fed that’s like yeah.”

PA: “Yeah I’d say that in the teamwork like that’s def one where like you do kinda get forced in it but it’s also the one that’s the hardest or at least for me was the hardest to actually make work.”

PD: “Teamwork like I remember in Costa Rica I was in these classes with these kids and we’d be assigned a group project they’re all about group projects at this university and I
speak good Spanish I would converse with them in Spanish and I’d be like what do you want me to do and they would insist that they were gonna do all the work and they would just like discount because you’re foreign you’re going to slow them down they’re going to have to explain I never really got to participate in a group setting.”

The researcher is able to summarize that one of the most reoccurring soft skills participants learned through their immersive study abroad experience was teambuilding skills. The quotes above provide excellent details about how they used these skills while completing their immersive experience abroad.

Initiative

Another reoccurring theme that emerged from the data was initiative. Participants learned to take initiative in their everyday lives abroad. Below are examples of how participants took initiative during their immersive experience abroad:

PD: “And also just initiative not to just close yourself in your dorm and just stay there initiative of like ok it’s Sunday everything’s closed I’m on the verge of being depressed I’ve gotta go do something I’m in this beautiful city where you know people come an vacation and I’ve been given money to come her I need to seize it and learn more than just like the school part um and that that took a lot of initiative.”

PA: “The initiative for me might be the biggest of these skills that you definitely get. Just going on study abroad is so much initiative even through UGA is a school where study abroad is really pushed and encouraged and you do have a lot of support especially on exchange you have to look a semester ahead you have to get a credit approval form together the year before you leave you know trying to find funding for it trying to you know buy your tickets you’re by yourself in this and you have to organize everything way before you get there…thrown into it right then and you have to find ok where am I living where is the grocery store where’s the bank how do I get money um there’s just so many things that are in the very beginning and then as you continue to go out and the four month exchange you don’t really have it’s great but really it takes a full three months and you constantly taking initiative and then you have like one month of enjoying your reward from three months initiative.”

PD: “Just getting to school is initiative in and of itself because it’s not even just like finding your way to school it’s like getting a transportation pass learning the transportation system learning where the bus is how to get off the bus in the first place you know it’s.”
PB: “Especially when we were traveling on vacation to new cities every three days we’d change cities and then you’re dropped into a city you don’t have a GPS you don’t have an iPhone you have a map. You have to find your hostile you don’t speak the language you don’t know anyone like that I think that was when ever I had the most critical thinking problem solving skills really um applied and practiced so.”

Through the data provided above, the researcher is able to summarize that participants clearly learned how to take initiative through their immersive experience abroad.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness was another theme that emerged from the data. Participants describe their experiences learning the cultural norms of their host country and the difference from their own cultural norms:

PC: “I kinda had the opposite experience here I’m very out going and I can talk to any person it’s a good thing and a bad thing because I’m like my mother in that aspect I’ll strike up a conversation with someone at the grocery store um but I found that in Switzerland you cant do that they don’t like it. Maybe that’s just where I was but I had um I don’t know over there it was I had a completely relearn how to interact in social situations um cause I have no problem walking up to people staring a conversation I love giving presentations but I was the only person who genuinely enjoyed giving presentation um but when I got over there and I had to like walk into this class where these kids have been going to school together for three years they all knew each other so I think that oral communication was a big thing that I didn’t have to learn I had to adjust.”

PD: “I think let’s see teamwork was definitely another one it also kinda redefined what I had perception of teamwork before hand um because like you don’t really encounter any of the cultural differences until you’re in a group where you are doing a group project with people a different culture of a different language and I think that was when I encountered more of the cultural differences beyond just like the superficial you don’t drop trash on the ground it’s like the fundamental differences.”

The third question the researcher asked participants was if they believed soft skills were necessary to have before completing a study abroad experience and if so which of
these skills are the three most important? Participants said the following as to which three they would pick:

Initiative

PC: “Self-management would be number one.”

PA: “Initiative and critical thinking.”

PD: “I’m on the communication side; I think communication, critical thinking, and self-management.”

PB: “I think initiative, self-management, and critical thinking but oral communication is really close on third.”

PA: “Although I think initiative can fall under self-management it’s like you have to make yourself have initiative.”

PA: “Like I said for me initiative was the biggest thing but importance for people who are going on study abroad I would maybe put initiative as self-management as part of that and I think this critical thinking and oral communication are some of the top three.”

The researcher is able to summarize that the two most important soft skills for students to have before completing a semester exchange abroad is initiative and critical thinking/problem solving.

The next question participants were asked was how they’ve used these skills after returning from their study abroad experience and are they better at using them because of your study abroad experience. Two domains emerged from the data, initiative and self-management.
Initiative

In response to the question above participants said they’ve used and are better at using the soft skill initiative. Participants said the following about how they’ve used initiative since returning from their experience abroad.

PA: “For sure um I think especially like initiative and leadership team building…I studied abroad um and after Costa Rica like I felt like I developed those things there but didn’t really transfer it back here and then after a second go in Brazil you know like involved in clubs I was always involved but never (a) leader never taking initiative and I came back and like I’ve two really big projects that I don’t think that def involved soft skills there’s one um like putting together starting this sustainable tailgate and like interacting with people and like setting up this whole thing involved lots of communication getting funding from the office of sustainability and then another one doing food literacy at an after school program this semester where I’m going and volunteering but actually I have this idea I’m gonna make it happen and doing it and so I think that’s something I really wouldn’t have done without so much having to take initiative and that experience without before.”

PC: “Before I studied abroad you know I enjoyed leading I enjoyed taking initiative but it was after I got back I realized wow I take a lot of initiative I can get things done um I didn’t really realize it before like I guess potential I couldn’t use these skills um and so yeah just coming back just in class I was I knew how to communicate better I would say because I had had to learn how to break things down and communicate things in several different ways and so having had to do that on a much more sever scale in a different language I could do it in English within like a certain project better if that makes sense, so in a different aspect yes definitely.”

After reading the data above, the researcher is able to summarize that participants are better at using the soft skill initiative after completing their immersive experience abroad.

Self-Management

The next theme that emerged from the data was self-management. Participants said the following about using the soft skill self-management after completing their immersive study abroad experience:
PA: “It definitely changes your perspective it just made me think about um kinda I mean stories so in Brazil I took this really great class it was called Governmental Politics applied to Agribusiness. I’ve never taken a macroeconomics class in my life I haven’t taken an econ class since high school and I knew nothing about agriculture in Brazil politics in Brazil any of that and so you’re sitting here in this class and you just like and when you’re in the moment you just do what you have to do and you’re like God this class is really hard I don’t understand anything and then you come back oh my God I’m glad it’s school why can’t I figure this out and then you get back to the US and you’re taking organic chemistry which you’ve been so afraid of for so many years you put it off till your very last year of college and you’re like piece of cake I got this because I just did macroeconomics in Portuguese and that was impossible and you figure out what your limits really are because you don’t think you’re just thrown into it and so you go way past your limits without realizing it and you get back and you’re like oh I know how to like manage myself now I know how to manage my time I know how to think critically in my own language this is great you know.”

PB: “When I came back I was done with school so I graduated and I didn’t I haven’t been back in undergrad so I don’t really have an instance in school setting that I’ve used it but I was def. able to tell people like in job interviews, explained to them how much initiative and self-management it takes to study abroad um that you really are on your own and that you have to figure things out and that you have to manage yourself and manage your time and manage your resources I guess that was a big thing I guess I learned how to manage resources so that’s something I guess I have for really taking away a viable moment is how to manage money better I guess the main thing I’ve come away with I mean definitely these were all improved but I can’t think of a single instance.”

The researcher is able to summarize that students learned, have used, and are better at using the soft skill self-management since completing their immersive experience abroad.

The next question participants were asked involved their perceptions of findings from a study of undergraduate student competencies from the standpoint of employers. The study reported that “foreign language capabilities and study abroad experiences were not perceived as critical skills or critical experiences needed among employers,” (Brooks, Flanders, Jones, Kane, McKissick, & Shepherd, 2008, p. 5). Two definite domains emerged from the data: some participants were indifferent and could see why employers did not deem them necessary and other participants completely disagreed with the results.
Disagreed with the Results Study Abroad is a Beneficial Learning Experience

The participants who disagreed with the results said the following:

PC: “We’re going to drop you off in another country and let you figure things out.”

PB: “I would probably bring up um just how global our society is now and the global economy um and just needing to have that perspective of like understanding different people and different cultures I think that’s something that I walked away with was I really feel like I have a better understanding of the world in general because I didn’t only meet Austrians I met people who are also studying in Austria so I really feel like I have a better understanding of how the world works and how different cultures can be how they can still interact and work well together so that’s probably what I would say.”

PD: “Even touristy things are a lot of work.”

Through the data provided, the researcher is given a clear understanding that participants do believe there is a great value associated with an immersive study abroad experience and that authors who suggest such experiences lack educational value should reconsider how they are defining “study abroad” experiences.

Indifferent

One participant was indifferent to the results of the study. PA said the following about the study’s results:

PA: “I’d like to know kinda the context of that because I don’t know like they don’t value it as much and what I don’t know I’d like to kind ah hear their perspective on it because to me I don’t know like don’t see it as critical as having specific like I get that but not seeing it like they really don’t value it. You know how much do they value it? You know maybe they still value it maybe just not that much I don’t know.”

In this response the researcher is able to understand the participant’s perception of the study’s findings and how employers poled in the study were possibly misinterpreted.
Finally, participants were asked how did your education at UGA prepare you for your immersive study abroad experience or did it not prepare you? Some participants said that UGA failed at adequately preparing them for their study abroad experience.

**UGA Did Not Prepare Students in the Classroom Prior to Studying Abroad**

Participants said the following about not being adequately prepared to study abroad:

PB: “I don’t think I did a lot of critical thinking or problem solving before hand but I can’t really remember not in class I didn’t like because on my own in college and I’m figuring stuff out.”

PB: “I don’t remember any classes going like oh I really figured out how to figure out a problem.”

PA: “That a really good point that I haven’t really thought about I was just thinking how content and stuff cause that’d be a way that UGA didn’t prepare me.”

PA: “Not that it can really be done in a class honestly.”

PD: “So yeah but I yeah like PA said I don’t know if there’s anyway that UGA could prepare us um yeah.”

Through the data provided, the researcher is able to understand participant’s perception of study abroad preparation at UGA. Perhaps participants did not know enough about the options available to UGA faculty to help prepare students for study abroad experiences through opportunities such as courses, seminars, international guest speakers, and fieldtrips.

**Ways UGA Can Prepare Students for Study Abroad in the Classroom**

Participants did mention a few ways that UGA does prepare students to study abroad. The participants said the following about how UGA does prepare students to travel abroad:
PB: “I think Dr. Duncan’s global class kinda gives you an idea of maybe their educational style when you see all the different presentations.”

PD: “Yeah well as much as you know I’ve kinda say like oh that four hour cultural differences class that I took with Collen you know like oh that darn class.”

PD: “It was painful but like when I got there I understood why she did it and um you know I like I had already been abroad before and so it was kind alike oh great tell me something I don’t know but them getting there whoa for somebody who had who has never been abroad you know has these assumptions about Europe you know I could see where that really does have value.”

The last question the researcher asked participants was what recommendations or advice would you give UGA to better prepare students to study abroad. The answers participants gave varied based on their previous experiences abroad and the preparation they received at UGA prior to their immersive study abroad experience. Three major domains emerged from the data, contacts, things to bring with you while you’re abroad, and finding adequate housing before traveling abroad.

Contacts

The most recurring domain that emerged from the data provided in the last question of the second focus group was contacts. In these quotes, participants discuss the importance of having contacts (people overseas to assist in your stay) on hand. The participants said the following about contacts:

PD: “Try to gather as many contacts as you can… I would definitely recommend reach out to people that are going with you from UGA reach out to like any kinda contact possible that you could have with your home country or town or city or whatever because when you like you think that you’re all independent and you’ve got it down like when you have like you know two suitcases and a huge backpack alone in the airport it’s intimidating um and so being able to like lean on somebody as big or you know small it’s important.”
PA: “I’d say taking like contacts is huge and having someone you know you can rely on there um beyond that like a contact is someone like really I think my hardest thing you need to know.”

PB: “Um I think what was really helpful I didn’t get this but PD did it they met with someone who went to Austria before they left and if they could find someone else who was a UGA student who studied abroad in the country they’re about to go to that would be really helpful so you could ask any questions that you have.”

PD: “Or even just having that person in the back of their mind or like being able to email somebody and be like hey what’s up with the blah blah blah blah blah.”

From the answers given, the researcher can conclude that the need for local contacts within the host country students are studying in are necessary for participants to have before traveling abroad.

**Things to Bring While You’re Abroad**

Participants discussed below all of the health related items they believe important to have access to while abroad. Participants said the following:

PD: “Or like the tampons was a big issue.”

PD: “I let the girls know take a supply of tampons. I got in contact with her through the office of international education she’s like an international advisor or something here whatever um and she’s like oh and by the way like we’re on recording oh well.”

PD: “The tampons don’t have applications like it is just straight up tampon so you might want to take your own tampons when you go and I was like thanks!! I emailed the thread that we had going on before going with the other girls like oh and guys like make sure that you bring your vitamins and your ibuprofens and your tampons.”

PA: “Yeah. That’s a really big one for girls cause I had in Brazil that was part of the other thing to just like the icing on the cake like yeah that’s a big deal also like there are some places like in Latin America I couldn’t get tampons period.”

PA: “Pads, pads so like really the office of international education for real like girls I don’t think that’s something inappropriate to bring up at this meeting of exchange students be like ladies you might wanna bring your own female products because they’re very different and much spacer in other parts of the world.”
PD: “Another big thing that I would say is like take your vitamins over there because your diet is gonna be like crap for like the first month.”

PD: “Right so like take your multivitamins so that you don’t collapse so that your hair doesn’t fall out so that your nails are ok then once you get you know once you’ve bought your pots and pans to cook everything like then you’re ok hahahaha.”

From the data, the researcher can summarize that it is very important students know all of the health issues that could arise while abroad and to be notified of necessary items to take with them ahead of time.

Finding Adequate Housing

One participant in the second focus group, Participant A (PA) had a difficult time finding appropriate housing for their semester exchange abroad. PA said the following about their experience finding appropriate housing:

PA: “You need to know like find housing before you get there start looking at housing before you get there have someone in the country that is like watching out for you. I never felt in Brazil there was anyone watching out for me I could’ve disappeared and hardly anyone would’ve known. How do I look for a place to rent in this place where I don’t speak the language like calling people on the phone, I don’t have a cell phone what? It was so bad for me, that really can set the tone for your trip having someone come pick you up from the airport versus fumbling your way around. I actually went to Brazil the semester before like the fall semester or the spring semester and had so much of a break down that I had to come back after a month and go back the next month. I got put in this really really crapy crapy apartment with really weird people that were smoking pot all the time and a creepy 40 year old man was living up stairs and no one would talk to me I had to carry my poop outside because the plumbing did not work and I was far from campus and no one cared and I just broke down in front of my professor who was supposed to be coordinating me one day and he was like what is her problem? I’ve been telling you for a month. They were on strike there was like you can’t control the strike but you can control whether there is a professor or someone of authority there to take care of me and find me somewhere to live or at least have ideas of where to live before I come. I know one thing when the Latin Americans Studies department received students from Costa Rica they could just reserve a place in the dorm for them and that would be so good for them but they never do it because they always say they we don’t wanna pick somewhere for them that they don’t like it. (It’s) so much better to have a place picked out for someone and then they can then move out of than for them to arrive and
everybody be to busy to help them find somewhere to live. I think that was really traumatic for me and so like you know you need to have someone helping you it’s such a good feeling to have somewhere to unpack your suit case and I think that that’s something especially on an exchange where it’s more independent you really need to have a better level of support.”

The researcher can conclude from this data that appropriate housing is necessary for students who are completing a semester exchange abroad and that it can either make the experience worthwhile or inadequate.

**Semester Internship Abroad vs. Semester Exchange Abroad**

To indicate the similarities and differences of both study abroad programs, the researcher created Table 1. The primary similarities the researcher discovered were participant’s lack of knowledge of soft skills, the three soft skills each group used during their immersive study abroad experience (self-management, initiative, critical thinking problem solving), and the consensus from both groups that overall, College of Agriculture undergraduate students do develop soft skills through an immersive study abroad experience.
Table 1

**Semester Internship Abroad vs. Semester Exchange Abroad. Domains are presented in order of dominance in the raw data.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel) n=6</th>
<th>Similarities Between the Focus Groups</th>
<th>Focus Group 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel) n=4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivational Factors for Studying Abroad</td>
<td>The researcher did not find similarities in regards to participant’s motivational factors for studying abroad.</td>
<td>Motivational Factors for Studying Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentorship</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Financial Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internal Motivation</td>
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<td>• Career Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Personal Reasons</td>
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<td>• Experience Something New</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Humanitarian Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Acquisition of a Foreign Language</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Completing their Internship Abroad</td>
<td>Before Completing their Immersive Study Abroad Experience</td>
<td>Before Completing their Semester Exchange Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>• Neither group of participants had knowledge of soft skills.</td>
<td>• Teambuilding Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
<td>• Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>• Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal Growth</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Self-management</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Before Completing their Semester Exchange Abroad

- Teambuilding Skills
- Initiative
- Cultural Awareness
Table 1

*Semester Internship Abroad vs. Semester Exchange Abroad (Continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel)</th>
<th>Similarities Between the Focus Groups</th>
<th>Focus Group 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>During their Internship Abroad</strong></td>
<td><strong>During Completing their Immersive Study Abroad Experience</strong></td>
<td><strong>During their Semester Exchange Abroad</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-Management</td>
<td>• Self-management</td>
<td>• Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>• Initiative</td>
<td>• Self-Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
<td>• Critical Thinking Problem Solving</td>
<td>• Teambuilding Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initiative</td>
<td>• Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>• Cultural Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teambuilding Skills</td>
<td>• Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
<td>• Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After Completing their Internship Abroad</strong></td>
<td><strong>After Completing their Immersive Study Abroad Experience</strong></td>
<td><strong>After Completing their Semester Exchange Abroad</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initiative to be Extroverted</td>
<td>• Participants definitely practice soft skills after returning from an immersive study abroad experience.</td>
<td>• Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practiced Soft Skills More</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**UGA Study Results**
- Believe some study abroad programs are more like vacations.
- Former teachers and friends discouraged some focus group 1 participants from studying abroad.

**UGA Study Results**
- Agreed with the study’s results; depending on a person’s future career goals.
- Believe there is only something to be gained (learned) through an immersive study abroad experience.

**UGA Study Results**
- Wanted to know the context in which the study was conducted.
- Suggested non-global companies do not value immersive study abroad experiences.
- Believe immersive study abroad experiences are extremely beneficial.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills (initiative, critical thinking/problem solving, and self-management) in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. Past research identified that little is known of the impact an immersive study abroad experience has on College of Agriculture undergraduate students and if they do or do not develop soft skills through study abroad experiences. The researcher wanted to identify why study abroad programs are or are not unique and if undergraduate students develop soft skills because of this experience. The researcher conducted two focus groups; one with students who completed a semester internship abroad (students traveling alone), and one with students who completed a semester exchange abroad (students traveling in groups). Domains (themes) emerged that explained the significance of this experience and its role in developing soft skills in undergraduate students. These themes were also used to help understand why an immersive study abroad experience is so unique for College of Agriculture undergraduate students and their development of soft skills. The researcher wanted to examine specifically (1) motivational factors for completing an immersive study abroad experience, (2) the self-perceived competency of students at using these skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they returned home, and (3) what about this experience makes it so unique.
Review of Methods

A qualitative approach was used for this study because the researcher felt that qualitative data would provide a deeper understanding of the participants’ experience abroad. Through qualitative research methods, the researcher was able to establish a trusting relationship with participants and ask probing questions. For this study, faculty within the Office of Global Programs (OGP) of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) at the University of Georgia (UGA) purposefully selected participants. All ten of the participants completed an immersive study abroad experience. An immersive study abroad experience was defined for the foundation of this study as an experience abroad lasting at least four weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks). Six of the participants completed an internship abroad and four of them completed a semester exchange abroad. Thus, two focus groups were established, one with participants who had completed an internship abroad and one with participants who had completed a semester exchange abroad. The researcher chose to divide the two groups of participants in order to compare the data collected by the two different immersive experiences. Specifically, students experiencing the internship abroad traveled alone, while students experiencing the semester exchange abroad traveled in groups. The students who completed internships abroad participated in the first focus group and the remaining four students who completed semester exchange programs abroad participated in the second focus group. The first focus group lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes and the second focus group lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes. The researcher wanted to examine specifically motivational factors for completing an immersive study abroad experience, how good students were at using soft skills prior to their experience.
abroad, how good they were at using soft skills after returning from abroad, and what about this experience makes it so unique. During the focus groups, the researcher attempted to develop a relationship with the participants in order to truly understand their feelings and thought about immersive their study abroad experiences. The focus groups were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using domain analysis. Each focus group was analyzed question by question. Domains that emerged from each focus group were then further analyzed to develop constructs. The researcher worked to identify the differences and similarities between the two different types of immersive study abroad experiences then compared the constructs of each focus group. Member checks were also used and the transcriptions and themes that emerged were sent to each focus group participant for their review. The researcher also completed a peer review process in which the transcriptions were also reviewed by another graduate student and professor as a measure of credibility.

**Summary of Findings**

Results from the data are displayed in Chapter 4. After the researcher reviewed each focus group individually and extracted domains, a total of 21 themes emerged from the data of the first focus group and 13 themes emerged from the second focus group. The two focus groups were then compared against each other and the differences and similarities were revealed. The domains from both focus groups that emerged from the three areas the researcher wanted to specifically examine, (1) motivational factors for completing an immersive study abroad experience, (2) the self-perceived competency of students at using soft skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they
returned home, and (3) what about this experience makes it so unique, are presented in the tables below.

The domains displayed in the Table 2 reflect the motivational factors of participants for completing an immersive experience abroad in order of dominance. Students from focus group 1 completed an internship abroad, engaging in individual travel, believed that mentorship, personal reasons, humanitarian assistance, internal motivation, and acquisition of a foreign language were the key motivational factors that influenced them to participate in study abroad program. Students from focus group 2 completed a semester exchange abroad, engaging in group travel, identified financial incentives, career goals, and experience something new were the key motivational factors that influenced them to participate in a study abroad program.

**Table 2**

*Motivational Factors for Completing an Immersive Study Abroad Experience. Domains are presented in order of dominance in the raw data.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel)</th>
<th>Focus Group 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Financial Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reasons</td>
<td>Career Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Assistance</td>
<td>Experience Something New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of a Foreign Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The domains displayed in the Table 3 reflect self-perceived competency of students at using soft skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they returned home in order of dominance. Students from focus group 1 completed an internship abroad, engaging in individual travel, believed cultural awareness, critical thinking, personal growth initiative, and self-management as the primary self-perceived
competency using soft skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they returned home. Students from focus group 2 completed a semester exchange abroad, engaging in group travel, identified initiative, self-management, teambuilding skills, and cultural awareness as the primary self-perceived competency using soft skills prior to, during their experience abroad, and once they returned home.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel)</th>
<th>Focus Group 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
<td>Self-Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
<td>Teambuilding Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td>Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Findings and Implications

Motivational Factors for Completing an Immersive Study Abroad Experience

Participants in both focus groups identified a number of motivational factors that influenced their decision to participate in an immersive study abroad experience. One motivational factor that influenced participants of the second focus group, engaging in-group travel, was the domain entitled career goals. Two participants believed that they could further enhance their future career goals by completing an immersive study abroad experience where their field of study was superior. For example, one participant chose to
study abroad in Brazil, a universal leader in sustainable agricultural practices, to make themselves more marketable in the organic agricultural realm in the United States. This participant would not have received this advanced training had they not completed their immersive study abroad experience in Brazil. Research indicates career goals as a common motivational factor among college students nationwide to participate in an immersive study abroad experience. In a study conducted by Franklin (2010), forty-two percent of the participants surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their career choice was swayed because of their previous study abroad experiences. Franklin (2010) also found of all the respondents who participated in the study’s survey, “39 percent strongly agreed, 54 percent agreed, 8 percent disagreed, and none strongly disagreed that their career choice was swayed because of their previous study abroad experiences,” (p. 179). Comparatively, an earlier study conducted by Dwyer (2004) found that students who completed a full-year study abroad program were much more likely to have chosen a career that allows them to speak a language other than English in the workplace as well as acquire soft skills and professional contacts that swayed their career choice. Dwyer (2004) also found that students who participated in an immersive study abroad experience lasting at least one full-year were two or three times more likely to change career paths than students who chose to study abroad for shorter periods of time.

Another study conducted by Orahood, Woolf, and Kruze (2008) discusses career paths of business students. In this study, the authors discuss the Kelley School of Business (KSB) at Indiana University (IU) and their early recognition of how beneficial international experience is for students. KSB has implemented an international dimension requirement (IDR) for all business students. Of the students at KSB, 48
percent of them participate in a study abroad experience to fulfill this requirement. The findings from these studies imply that study abroad is becoming a necessity for completing a degree program at a university or when applying for jobs in today’s workplace.

Another domain (motivational factor) that emerged from the data was *foreign language acquisition*. Dwyer (2004) found that students who participate in a full-year study abroad experience represent a self-selected group and are perhaps more likely to be interested in studying foreign languages in order to improve their employability. Dwyer (2004) also noted that students who participate in an immersive study abroad experience are twice as likely to cultivate lifelong friendships with individuals from the host country in which they completed their experience abroad. This result supports another domain that emerged from the data, *humanitarian assistance*. Evidence from all of the studies cited above supports the domains that emerged from the data regarding motivational factors for completing an immersive study abroad experience.

*Self-Perceived Competency of Students at Using Soft Skills Prior to, During Their Experience Abroad, and Once They Returned Home*

In today’s workforce, it is imperative that recent college graduates have soft skills in order to be competitive in the current job market. A cross-institutional survey conducted by Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, and Feltiz (2011) on the seven most important soft skills “clusters” graduates need today found that these skills are “experience, team skills, communication skills, leadership skills, decision making/problem solving skills, self-management skills, and professionalism skills” (p. 2). Each of these “clusters” described by Crawford et. al. (2011) included seven descriptive
characteristics. According to the results from the study conducted by Crawford et. al. (2011) the following is the list of skills ranked from most to least important by employers: communication skills, decision making/problem solving skills, self-management skills, teamwork skills, professionalism skills, experiences and leadership skills. However, Crawford et al. (2011) emphasized that the order in which these skills were ranked does not indicate that they are not all equally important, it is simply a “reflection of priority when trade-offs need to be considered in decision-making” (p. 9). Comparatively, a study conducted by Robles (2012) found that executives in today’s workforce indicate “integrity and communication are the top soft skills needed by employees in today’s workplace,” (p. 455). For the purpose of this study, participants in both focus groups believed that the most critical of soft skills they learned from their immersive study abroad experience (in no particular order of importance) were cultural awareness, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, self-management, critical thinking/problem solving, initiative, and teambuilding skills. The skills outlined by participants of both focus groups clearly correlate with the skills Crawford et al. (2011) found are most important for today’s college graduates to possess.

The personal growth process that students experience while abroad could possibly help explain the acquisition of soft skills through immersive study abroad experiences. The researcher found that students who participated in the first focus group (individual travel) experienced significant personal growth. Through intense analysis of the raw data, the researcher is able to conclude that students who complete an internship abroad (individual travel) spend a significant amount of time either by themselves or with individuals that speak a foreign language. This type of “isolation” provides students with
ample time to reflect on their experience and personality thus allowing them to decipher a way to grow and complete their internship abroad. Ingraham and Peterson (2004) explain that the “psychological challenge posed by the unfamiliar is particularly acute when abroad and, while sometimes the anguish it can cause (e.g., homesickness, depression) can diminish the benefit, there is no doubt that the predominate effect on personal growth is positive and profound,” (p. 94). This implication supports the notation that study abroad can be a difficult experience for students, but they gain personally in the most positive and profound ways. Hadis (2005) found that students experience personal growth and learn “to make their own decisions and become more open to new ideas as a result of their having studied abroad,” (p. 67). This study implies that students experience tremendous personal growth and gain valuable soft skills through their immersive experience abroad. This conclusion also explains why students from the second focus group (group travel) developed teambuilding skills and lacked in the development of personal growth. Students who completed a semester exchange abroad (group travel) traveled with students from UGA or completed a semester of classes with students of a foreign university. Although these students did not experience such immense personal growth, the researcher was able to conclude after close examination of the raw data that they did experience some personal growth.

What About This Experience Makes it so Unique?

In the first focus group, students were asked “what about their study abroad experience made it so unique?” The response students gave indicated that the experiences/relationships they made with others while living in the host country, and
their development of soft skills made their immersive experience incredibly unique. To indicate how special this experience was for a participant in the first focus group (Internship Abroad, individual travel), the researcher chose to share a quote from a student who completed an immersive study abroad experience in Taiwan. The student said the following made their immersive experience so unique:

PC: “When I was in Taiwan we went to a tour that the professor arranged for us she had two or her assistants graduate assistants to bring me and a student from El Salvador and the students cousins who are form California who went out to eat pigs feet so it’s well we couldn’t I could communicate with both groups but they communicate with each other so we were sitting at a round table and we were very silent we were sitting there and the American friends they were staring at the pigs feet they didn’t know how to start and there were pigs intestines on the table that was served as an item and it was dead silent so I had to say you know what I would facilitate the conversation I will translate for the Taiwanese students and I would talk back to the ah El Salvador students and their California cousins. I never spoke a single sentence of Spanish when I talk to the student from El Salvador I try to use every single Spanish phrase I could use all the things I learned from La Fiesta when I order things when I call the waitress to come I say Senora could you I want this and that all the things I could say in Spanish was Gracias cause I will use every single thing I could try to get them to communicate with each other then I find more common grounds among the two groups they all like basketball and so did I so we got the conversation started.”

A study conducted by Ingraham and Peterson (2004) noted that despite the anguish some students experience abroad, they have an increased confidence and self-reliance and a sincere desire to continue to travel abroad. Ingraham and Peterson (2004) also reported that students learn to develop a sense of humor as a means of coping with the unexpected and unfamiliar abroad. Often, students traveling from the United States visiting a different culture realize how immensely fortunate they are to have so much and how little it takes to be truly happy (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Orahood, Woolf and Kruze (2008) found that studying aboard for business students makes more of an impact on their personal growth and development over their future career choice.
An immersive study abroad experience is a significant life experience and thus the theoretical premise of this study. Significant Life Experience Research (SLER) is generally used within the discipline of environmental education to assess and understand significant experiences that influence people’s environmental concerns and behaviors. It is most typically associated with qualitative research methods, thus examining the emotional and revealing side of human experiences (Chawla, 1998). Students participating in study abroad are also interacting with others in a diverse environment. Although what makes an experience significant is different for every individual it is significant enough to change a person’s emotions and behaviors. The researcher concludes this finding with the implication that a unique experience is completely dependent upon the individual. What makes an experience unique for one person may not make it unique for another individual. In conclusion, the researcher believes that each immersive study abroad experience is uniquely different and students do develop soft skills through this type of experience. The researcher also believes that each experience is equally beneficial, however, students should potentially be given a personality assessment prior to traveling abroad to ensure they participate in the most beneficial experiences. University faculty also should consider the type of student, their future career goals, personality traits, and theoretically their personality assessment results before allowing them to complete either study abroad experience (internship or semester exchange) because these study abroad programs are so immersive. Each immersive study abroad experience is unique and that these experiences develop soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students.
Recommendations for Research

While this study provided information about College of Agriculture undergraduate students and the correlation their immersive study abroad experience has with their development of soft skills, this is just one examination of one College of Agriculture. More research is needed to understand if College of Agriculture undergraduate students do develop soft skills through an immersive study abroad experience and what about study abroad contributes to this growth. The following are possible research topics for future studies:

1. A qualitative study to understand the lack of male participation in immersive study abroad programs.

2. Longitudinal studies to assess the perceived development of soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students well beyond their involvement in study abroad.

3. Quantitative study to understand specific motivational factors that influence students to participate in immersive study abroad programs conducted with a larger student population. Domains from this qualitative study could be used as a basis for developing the quantitative instrument.

4. A qualitative evaluation to understand what university faculty can do to better prepare students in the classroom before completing an immersive study abroad experience.

5. Repeat this study with students in College’s of Agriculture in other states as well as with students not in a College of Agriculture. This may help understand how, if it at all, College of Agriculture students differ from other students.
Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this study was to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in College of Agriculture undergraduate students. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized for all College of Agriculture undergraduate students, the findings can be transferred and used by other College’s of Agriculture. The following are recommendations for other College’s of Agriculture who would like to assess soft skill development of their students who have completed an immersive study abroad experience:

1. A College of Agriculture must make a conscious effort to develop and infuse a seminar class into the curriculum of immersive study abroad participants that allows them to prepare before they depart, reflect during their immersive experience, and unpack their experience upon return (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011).

2. University faculty should encourage students to reflect during their immersive experiences through keeping a daily recording tool to serve as a method of evaluation. This reflection tool could be in the form of a journal, blog, or a daily group reflection (for the semester exchange abroad students only).

3. University faculty need to educate undergraduate students about soft skills and provide them with experiences to develop them, knowledge to recognize them when practiced, and the importance of practicing them in today’s workplace.

4. University faculty need to encourage students to internationalize their curriculum by participating in an immersive study abroad experience.
5. University faculty should be encouraged to implement measures that evaluate the personal characteristics of potential study abroad students. This measure would ensure that students are placed in the most beneficial immersive study abroad experience based on their personality traits and future career goals.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

Dear <<insert participant name>>,

You have been selected to participate in a research study entitled “Understanding the Impact of Study Abroad Programs on College Student’s Soft Skills in a College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.” The purpose of this study is to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in college of agriculture undergraduate students (CAES).

Your participation is crucial for the improvement of existing and future study abroad programs as well as promoting the programs offered through the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Global Programs in CAES. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group session that will last between 45-minutes and 1-hour. All information gathered from the study will remain confidential and your identity will not be associated with any of your responses.

The focus group is scheduled for Monday, January 28th at 6:30pm in the second floor conference room in the Hoke Smith building. Food and a small gift will be provided.

Please contact me with your decision to participate by January 25, 2013. Thank you for your consideration.

Carolina Robinson,
Study Abroad Recruitment Coordinator, CAES
APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

December 3, 2012

Dear Student:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Nick Fuhrman in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in my research study entitled “Understanding the Impact of Study Abroad Programs on College Student’s Soft Skills in a College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences” which I am conducting as part of my Master’s thesis. The purpose of this study is to determine the significance of immersive study abroad experiences in relation to building soft skills in college of agriculture undergraduate students.

Your participation will involve interaction with me in a 45-minute to 1-hour focus group that will be audio-recorded. As soon as the focus group recording is transcribed into a computer, the tape will be destroyed (within approximately 60 days). Any information you provide that is individually identifiable will remain confidential and your name will not be associated with any of your responses. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project may provide improvements associated with existing study abroad programs as well as promote study abroad programs to current and future students. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call my advisor, Dr. Nick Fuhrman, at (706) 542-8828 or send e-mail to fuhrman@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By participating in the focus group, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration, please keep this letter for your records.
Sincerely,

Sarah DeLoach, Master’s Degree Candidate
APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval Form

APPROVAL FORM

Date Proposal Received: 2012-11-07  
Project Number: 2013-10403-0

Name  
Dr. Nick Feherman  
Ms. Sarah Delach

Title  
ALEC  
Agricultural, Leadership, Education, and Communication

Dept./Phone  
352-226-1106  
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Agricultural, Leadership, Education, and Communication

Email  
feherman@uga.edu  
sgdl89@uga.edu

Title of Study: Understanding the Impact of Study Abroad Programs on College Students' Soft Skills in a College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences

45 CFR 46 Category: Administrative 2

Parameters:

Approved: 2012-12-18  
Expires: 2015-12-18

NOTE: Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end date collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be considered approved.

Your human subjects study has been approved.

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to inform the IRB:

...of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to the subjects or others within 24 to 72 hours...
...of any significant changes or additions to your study and obtain approval of them before they are put into effect...
...that you need to extend the approval period beyond the expiration date shown above...
...that you have completed your data collection as approved, within the approval period shown above, so that your file may be closed.

For additional information regarding your responsibilities as an investigator refer to the IRB Guidelines.  
Use the attached Researcher Request Form for requesting renewals, changes, or closures.  
Keep this original approval form for your records.

[Signature]
Chaiman of Designee  
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX D

Focus Group Number 1: Internship Abroad (Individual Travel) Transcriptions
(M): Ok guys, so to get started tonight I just thought I’d tell ya little bit about
myself um give you some history just a little bit background of who I am, what my
um background is as far as education and that kinda thing goes, and maybe a little
bit about my study abroad experience. So my name is Sarah DeLoach and I’m a
graduate student right now, I’m pursing my Master’s in Agricultural Leadership,
um I’m from the very small little metropolis, one red light town of Fort White,
Florida. Has anybody heard of the Ichteucknee River, Ginnie Springs, any of that
area? No, ok that’s what we’re famous for the Ichteucknee River and all the
natural springs that surround us. Um but I’m from a tiny tiny one red light town, I
did my undergraduate degree at the University of Florida, I’m a Gator but please
don’t hold it against me, I need you to talk tonight, um like through and through
kinda thing, I like grew up with Spurrier coaching ball from the womb kinda thing,
it’s a Holy experience, um, anyway, so I did that and I’m here at UGA getting my
Master’s I’m on assistantship and I’m working with Dr. Fuhrman and also a college
of his Dr. Morgan, um, I’ve done a little bit of teaching here at UGA I taught a class
last fall, TAed another class with a graduate student in the Spring, and worked a
little this summer TAing with some of the professors so I have a little bit of
experience working with students, but I was an ambassador in the College of Ag at
Florida and I’m really interested in maybe having a job kinda like Carolina’s or
Brice Nelson’s. I love working with college students and um right now I’m a
graduate student or a graduate advisor for one of the undergraduate clubs here on
campus, ACLT, the Ag Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow. So um my
study abroad experience, I started traveling abroad when I was, I think 15, the
summer 2004 and I’ve traveled with EF Tours every summer until this past
summer, so I think I’ve taken seven eight trips abroad with EF, um and then I’ve
also traveled to China with the University of Florida and spent a couple of weeks
and then also to Costa Rica and so we went down there on a grant project as an
undergrad working with the College of Ag, um so I’ve traveled, I think I’ve done
pretty well done most of Europe um I’ve done England, France, Austria, Germany,
Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Norway, Sweden, Denmark…Check Republic, Hungary,
a good bit of it, Ireland, Scotland, and then I’ve also been to Morocco, we did a day trip from Spain um over to Morocco, so I’ve touched Africa um I haven’t quit seen it all but I’ve touched Africa, I’ve been to Morocco um gosh and then the summer before I came to UGA I traveled to New Zealand and um Australia, and China all in that one summer so I crossed the International Date Line twice that’s big and then I came here and you see my life now, so big change, enjoy it while you can as an undergrad so study abroad for me is something that I’m very passionate about and um and I think it’s one of the best forms of education you can give someone is to send them somewhere and it opens your eyes to not only that one culture but that the world is so much bigger than like that one little red light town where I’m from and there’s so much more out there and there’s so many different ways of thinking and ways of doing than what I perceive and what my family does and that kinda thing it’s truly an eye opener so Dr. Fuhrman sat me down and he said ok now what do you want to do for your thesis, my first question or my first answer was noting, I don’t want to do a thesis period so let’s move on to the next thing and he said nah nah nah you gotta do one he did let me choose my topic and it’s something that I’m really excited about it and um and that I wanted talk to you guys about tonight, so I just kinda get your read on your study abroad experience and if you think you learned anything from it um so before we get started with the focus group questions if you guys would go around and say your name where you went and how long you were abroad. PA we’ll start with you. This participant.

(PA): Ok, um well I went abroad the last two summers so um just this past one I was in Costa Rica for a six week study abroad program um actually it was through Warnell, um the Forestry School, it was conservation medicine and conservation biology and then the summer before that I was in Germany for ten weeks um and doing a internship with a dairy cattle veterinarian.
Participant B (PB): Alright I’m PB and I did a year in New Zealand this past um few semesters, I was doing an organic agriculture internship as well as a um horticultural amenity internship at the Christ Church botanic gardens and um the organic agricultural internship was actually just working on different farms all around New Zealand, um I would change farms maybe every two to three weeks and I did that for about five months and then the remaining three of four months I was there I was just traveling by myself hiking and having a look around. Um and the summer before that I did a garden tour study abroad program with the horticulture department um and toured Ireland, Scotland, England, and France and a couple of days in the Netherlands. Um yep.

Participants C (PC): Ok, PC and I come from China but I went to Taiwan the last of summer for agribusiness and um international agriculture development I spent forty-two days there ah what I did there was um let me think about it. I joined a ah agro, agro tourism evaluation tour that was hosted by the um some kinda of their department of state, they did they have these tours so I went there and I was assistant for some paper work stuff and then I shadowed a ah professor National Pintung University for some of her research work and I followed her to visit the farmers association and did some few visits to some fruit plants and rice fields.

Participants M: Ok, Participant D.
(PD): Um my name is PD and I went this past summer to Ecuador and I was there for eight weeks and I was working on a chocolate farm.

(M): Wow, cool.

(PD): Hahaha…

(M): Did you actually make the chocolate or did you just harvest the coco?

(PD): Um we did everything from like management of the orchards to making the finished product.

(M): Wow, lucky you.

(PD): It smelled amazing hahahaha.

(M): That is my one big weakness, I love chocolate mmmmm.
(PE): I’m PE and I this summer I went to Spain were I did a ten week internship at an agricultural research lab specifically in animal health and actually just parasites not as it sounds interesting, it was a very dirty job.

(M): Ok, Participant E.

(PF): Ok I’m PF I two summers ago, I did a Maymester in France, a UGA program, and then I did eight weeks in Greece, um but it was not a UGA program, um and I did two weeks in well while I was in Greece I did two weeks of that was an internship in the vineyards and the green house and then six weeks was agro tourism.

(M): Very good, ok so it sounds like you all have had quit a bit of extensive um study abroad experiences. So I’m interested to hear what all you’ve really learned and kinda how you’ve grown through these experiences maybe. Um I first wanna start off by asking you what were some of the factors that influenced you to study abroad, including like for example, location of the study abroad, um any individuals, financial incentives, um future career goals, what was the drawing card for you to want to study abroad? What made you say yes that’s def. what I want to do to is go somewhere and staying a completely different culture something that’s completely different for me for how ever long, why did you choose to study abroad?

(PA): Do you want me to start?

(M): Sure this...
(PA): Or I don’t know what do you guys or should, how do you want….

(M): The way this works, I should’ve gone over this, the way this works is just a conversation guys, just forget that the recorders are even there if you can just kick back take it easy um and whoever wants to jump into begin with that’s that’s fine, you guys just whenever you feel like you wanna say something for example if PA says what influenced her to study abroad and you say yeah yeah that kinda really made me want to study abroad to, that was one of the things that really kind drew me in and made me want to consider study abroad you know this is just like we’re talking just friends around the dinner table, free to chime in and say whatever, um none of this information that you say tonight is gonna get back to Carolina it’s not gonna get back to Dr. Fuhrman so if you had the worst experience of your life and you hated working with UGA and specifically Carolina that’s fine, whatever you say stays completely confidential and if you’ll look at the letter that’s sitting on your desks it tells you all about the study and the confidentiality. So your names, you’re going to be participant A, B, C, D nobody’s going know who you are what you’ve said so please be as candid as you as you will be. So what were some of the factors that influenced you guys to study abroad?

(PA): I guess speaking of Carolina, it was well her apart but primarily it was my honors program mentor Dr. Thomas was just pushing going abroad and there’s like no other, like you were saying there’s no other time you can that you’ll have the time in your life to do it take advantage of this opportunity and I never looked into it because of the financial reasons and he was like gave me to do list, I want you to come back with a certain list of scholarships next time I see you and then you know like step by step he did check points for me and then handed me off to Carolina to explore more and um yeah that was pretty much the push for me.
(M): Wow.

(PB): That’s pretty much the exact same thing for me, Dr. Thomas…

(PA): Hahahahaha

(PB):…always my advisor in the horticulture department and he has a really good working relationship with Carolina and the he knows a lot about the opportunities to study abroad and how much it can enhance your um education um at this time in our lives so he kinda pushed me as well and I also never looked into it before because I didn’t think that I’d ever have the money to do it but there’s so much funding out there and um and um yeah it was def. beneficial to me.

(PA): Yeah pushed us that hard he was like hearing that I wasn’t going abroad this next summer and he was like why it’s your last summer as an undergrad hahahahah so apparently I’m getting lectured again about this but we’ll see what happens. He said why aren’t you going? It’s your last summer as an undergrad. So apparently I’m getting lectured about this. Hahaha but we’ll see what I do.

(PB): Yeah and I guess I just kinda picked New Zealand because it is so far away and a totally different time zone, it’s an island culture, so much different than Georgia where I grew up so that’s maybe that’s why I made it all the way down there um I’m glad I did.

(PF): I wanted study abroad since like high school, I like I guess forever I wanted to travel that was what I wanted to do. That’s even why I like picked my major because I
wanted to think of something I was good at and that would allow me to travel the world
so that’s why I like ag because it’s all transferable skills are obvious so I met with
Carolina as a freshman probably a few weeks I was already here and cause I met with her
during orientation, and I met with her a lot and all the programs that I wanted to do failed
like Mexico that visa didn’t go through, Thailand had riots the year I wanted to go,
Brussels was canceled the year I wanted to go all my trips were being canceled just left
and right and it was awful but finally the France program worked by coincidence like she
didn’t even tell me about it, I went to the poultry science meeting and found out about it
and then the Greece one, I found out about it the year before cause Carolina told me
about it and then the year of they tripled the price, but I mean I wanted to do it since I
was like, you know when you’re so young you’ll like I’ll make it happen, so it wasn’t I
meant the financials didn’t deter me so I was just like we’ll make it happen one way or
another it’s gonna happen. Um so I guess it was me initiating it.

(M): Ok.

(PC): It’s very different for me why I study abroad because ah I study abroad all the time,
I come from China this is study abroad for me but, but I chose to go to Taiwan firstly um
it might be strange that I come from China and then I went to Taiwan but it’s important
for me to go there because we never went to Taiwan because of the disagreement
between Taiwan and China. So we don’t get to know many people from Taiwan so when
I heard of this of this trip I decided to go and ah I think National Pingtaug University of
Science and Technology really wanted someone from UGA to go there but ah ah nobody
could speak Chinese that ah that could go so I guess I was first one to go there and spend
some time with ah and their professors were really sacred to receive me there, they
thought I couldn’t speak Chinese nobody dared to take me as a as a mentee so but when I
went there I spoke I could speak fluent Chinese but not so fluently as my ah peers can but
I spoke good so ah we we had a good time but I realize how different it is a the lifestyle
has the way the farming works, how different it is between China and Taiwan and of course between Taiwan and the United States it’s very different.

(M): I guess they knew you were Chinese how did they, how was that relationship, did they…

(PC): They start to mock my accent. They started to mock my accent, our a tongue twister.

(M): Very cool, that’s interesting. PD, do you wanna tell us about your experience?

(PD): Well I ah originally wanted to do ah study abroad but yet I was also interested in kinda like international agriculture development kinda of like peace corp type humanitarian type thing and so um but I never wanted to take the language classes, you know, it’s it’s not exactly required for the college of ag so I was like I’m not gonna take it it’s gonna be to hard and I went and I took it and it was fine but so I found a place where this lady is trying to ah like help the community also ah incorporate more sustainable agriculture practices and stuff but ah but then when I got there it turned out to be ah um so much more like production and I'm not I mean they’re using sustainable practices but there was not very much involvement in the community which was ah was really big disappointment you know what I mean cause I’d gone into it because of like more of the people aspect than the agriculture and then I was like three people including myself on this farm for like and ah go to town like once a week, I mean sorta I guess that was a tangent but like ah getting into it for like the people aspect…
(M): So you really wanted to help do whatever you could to assist others abroad.

(PD): Yes exactly that’s why I wanted to do it, but I didn’t really get that experience so…

(M): You were more involved in the agricultural practices?

(PD): So mmmmmhhmmm so I guess I need to go abroad again or something haha…

(PE): UM I wanted to go abroad to obtain fluency in another language. And that failed. But um that’s mostly because everybody knows and could speak English and they were like just stop.

(M): Ok very cool, those were some of the incentives that really kinda drew me to study abroad too, I think I was a freshman in high school when I’d just completed my freshman year when my mom said oh well I’ve signed you up to go on this Europe trip and I’d seen posters and stuff all around school about it but I never thought po-dunk me why in the world would I go to Europe, I have no business going over there, you know? And I went and I can remember landing on the run way and thinking oh my just thought there would be something automatically different you know that I would be able to tell something completely different out of the ordinary that wasn’t in the states. We landed in the London, no what was it, I think the Gatwick airport right outside of London and I can remember getting in the initial like I guess idea of it there was nothing different, this looks the same it’s a little greener over here and in Florida there’s no sand everywhere but I mean it then
it was actually kinda when I got out, I don’t know, for me that was like I guess my
first incentive was my mother, she pushed me and made me go to see that there was
a bigger world out there than just Fort White, but I kinda got the travel bug after
that I was ready to go, I loved it, I wanted to go the next year so bad, I can
remember turning sixteen the next year and I was like I’ll even give up my sweet
sixteen birthday party I just wann go back one more time, I just I loved it I couldn’t
get enough of it. So that’s interesting to hear why you guys were so interested in
study abroad. So my next question for you is these days it’s been said that soft skills
are desired among college graduates seeking employment given your background
and your future career goals how would you define a soft skills. What is your
interpretation of a soft skill? You guys hear like bench scineces and then there’s
also kinda the soft skills oral communication, team work, um some of the ones
specifically that we’re going to be looking at tonight are critical thinking/problem
solving, initiative um leadership/team building, self management skills those kinda
things, so given your background and future career goals, some of the things you
guys are interest in pursing later on in life and having done a study abroad how
would you define a soft skill what is your definition.

(PF): I think it’s more humanitarian I guess its just people to people that’s all it is it’s
working with people communicating with people, dealing with people

(M): Ok so maybe the oral written communication aspect of it leadership teamwork.

(PB): Thinking about how to approach a problem um when dealing with other people
maybe thinking about how they might respond to the way that you use your words or the
way that your body language appears maybe or yeah maybe, maybe mostly
communication I guess I agree with that. Yeah...um you said something about time
management as well did you and critical thinking that’s that’s something I um I learned a
lot about on my study abroad as well cause I was left alone to work quit often and if I had
a problem you know was it gonna be you know walk all the way across however far and
find them or was I gonna try to really think about you know how would they want me to
work this out for myself and, and um whatever decision I make how will that affect later
days um and stuff like that. So…I guess I didn’t really know what a soft skill was before
I came tonight I hadn’t heard it phrased that way but I do understand what you’re saying.

(M): Ok, anybody else have an idea or a definition of a soft skill or something that
they perceive?

(PC): I think I agree with them on the aspect of communication, I didn’t have any
communication problem when I go to Taiwan because we speak the same language but
because we speak the same language however there is communication problem cause
when you speak of the same thing you use different terms. Especially if you are from
different regions of that language speaking area. I I left China when I was fifteen years
old, then I studied in Singapore, then came to the United States and then went back to
Taiwan so I have been to three different countries or regions where Chinese is spoken but
when we talk about the same thing we have different terms and we approach the same um
problem we have different attitudes towards it. For example I give you example when I
got to Taiwan in front of the library I saw flowers.

(M): Mmmhmmm.

(PC): They have flower rings they made a ring with flowers I thought somebody died
because in China this is a ritual, when somebody dies you give a flower ring, but I went
to ask my professor she say oh that’s for our anniversary I did the library was founded
like twenty years ago so it was just very different when in China you put a flower ring in
front of someone’s house they’re not going to be happy. So I guess it’s not only oral
communication of languages it’s how we approach things ah even even the same
language is spoken but the way we approach things is different.

(PF): There’s a big difference in being bilingual and bicultural. That’s a culture thing so
they’re different.

(M): Anybody else have anything they want to add.

(PD): Ummmm well I guess that made me think of ah something well um well like I had
said there was just me and then this fifty-five year old woman and then like a seventy-
seven year old man that lived on the farm and we’d go to town like once a week or
something and um my host mom you know she would always ask me and I like why I
was so sad or you know and I didn’t I always felt terrible because I’m hurting her
feelings and she I’m not happy here and she thinks it’s like her fault and it’s not her fault
you know and she’s so sweet so I felt terrible that um ha that I wasn’t but you can’t like
force yourself to be happy you know you’re either happy or you’re not and so like when
we would go to town like I would be like just talking to people of the town you know and
that made me a lot happier because I’m also very extraverted you know and so that she
was just she was just asking me like just all these questions and like I think you have to
know a lot about yourself and like what um like who you are and like what you need and
so like for like soft skills if you are extraverted and like maybe you would purse a job like
working with other people but if you’re like introverted then maybe you could like purse
a more like one on one job where so.
(M): Maybe something like in the bench sciences like a Dr. Parrot kinda job or something…

(PD): Yeah or something like that and so I think um study abroad def. helped me learn more about myself and like um I guess what qualities I have or like what environments I’d need to be successful.

(M): Very good. Anybody else want to add anything before we move on?

(PA): I mean I guess it’s like what you were saying with studying aboard it’s kinda that I think you develop them once you step outside that comfort zone like here at the University we learn things but it’s always in I mean we have labs and things but it’s usually in a lecture kinda setting and then I mean depending on what type of studying abroad you do um but comparing the two that I went on one with my internship I it was really just me and um the vet and then his three assistants and then we’d farms so it like ou were saying I was the youngest one there wasn’t much of that one on one communication I mean we met farmers and everything but then in comparison when I was in Costa Rica it was me and a group of twenty other um undergraduate and vet school students and there was a lot of um I don’t know speaking of different types of communication I guess you can develop them in different ways but from yeah studying abroad it felt really help with that to get you outside of that.

(M): To develop maybe some of those soft skills?
(PA): Yeah.

(M): That’s necessary do you think maybe the oral communication, written communication being able to just communicate with people and kinda learn weather it be cultural um the differences like you were talking about PC?  Ok.

(PD): I think, I think you also like realize there’s more to communication than just the words cause like you can gesture or like make faces and like that makes in like the tone like makes so much of a difference with like what people understanding you or maybe they get offended like whatever emotion attached to is more than just like words on a paper.

(M): Ok.

(PA): Yeah not completely knowing a language def. helps you learn that.

(PD): Yeah.

(M): And I really like what you said PF there’s a difference between being bilingual and bicultural. I think that’s that’s key. That’s really good.
(PF): I mean cause the same thing you mentioned I mean I, I’ve noticed before I ever traveled though like just I mean all of South America, Central America, and Spain um we all speak Spanish but you tell somebody something that is ok in Columbia to a Mexican and they get insulted you’re like whoa whoa what happened I think I got lost there or like for example I went to in France ah I asked ah someone I’m like oh it was a Spanish lady so I asked her where are the bathrooms, where are the bathrooms the way I would normally asked and she just like she changed the word, I was like what are you talking about…

(M): Mmmhmmmmm.

(PF): And she’s like that’s what a bathroom is and I was like no it’s not but anyways or I knew it was weird cause I mean I’m like I know we’re speaking the same language but what are you talking about? And so um but I, I, I, always asked it was interesting younger but it’s more frustrating when you’re trying to get something done, it’s more frustrating when I feel like they understand you and they’re just saying, just resaying what you’re saying so like you know what I mean? Like it’s like I know you understand me just…

(M): Put it in where I can, in my culture…

(PF): Well because there’s for example America I feel like the U.S. is more receptive to error like my mom she would always say can you spell that because it makes no like, she didn’t understand what you were saying but if you spell it it’s ok in Spanish it’s a phonetic language so if you ask if someone says can you spell that it’s like are you stupid did you not hear me just say it like it’s com like you would never do that and and I mean
because it’s a melting pot in the U.S. ok to like you would accept error that’s good and bad, it’s good because you’re more tolerate of people that are different but it’s bad because then some people do things thinking it’s right because even though you understand me if you don’t correct me I’ll go on thinking it’s ok and I’ll keep on saying it and it’s like not ok so um.

(PB): But at the same time it’s so hard to be corrected all the time.

(PF): That’s a problem and I’ve seen it I mean it I think it just depends…

(PB): Cause then…

(PF): Everyone’s experience before…

(PB): Definitely.

(PF): I love learning different things and like oh that’s what that mean to you or like just simple things in Spanish because it’s interesting but then when it’s with different cultures that you’ve dealt but I’m comfortable with Spanish so I can be like I can be like wait what does that mean to you or I mean you try to talk around it um but if you don’t know then I get more and that’s what the whole introverted extroverted thing I think is so complete different because if you just don’t feel I am I'm a very introverted as it is but I think it’s important you’re put outta your comfort zone to become extroverted but at the
same time if you don’t feel comfortable I’m automatically introverted cause your just observing. I mean I can’t just jump out there and be like I mean but that’s also very cultural too, I’m I mean ah I me I mean I wasn’t born in Columbia or anything but like there’s a different upbringing a different mentality in how you approach being abroad. Um and I don’t know if you guys did you guys oh know you didn’t do it cause exchanges but when you do an exchange they like they have like an exchange where in case you they had a video where they showed you how different people perceive Americans and that’s completely different to cause your like yeah how study abroad student how they perceive Americans before and after the students came.

(M): So maybe if you studied abroad in South America or somewhere they speak Spanish you know you have the native tongue do you think maybe they looked a you a little differently, you are American yes?

(PF): Yeah.

(M): Ok, maybe they looked at you a little differently because you have the native tongue you know parents or whatever it may be that have kinda brought you up in that culture maybe they were a little bit more, um I don’t really know how to word it, like PC’s example if you were if you were Chinese and you speak the language and all that kinda thing maybe they were a little bit more accepting in teaching you their culture and their I don’t know their ring example, know that’s just an example of our anniversary vs. where it would be oh know in China, I don’t know, I can’t really I don’t know how I'm trying to, what I'm trying to say but maybe a little more culturally tolerate because or maybe accepting of greater error I guess is what I wanna say.
(PD): I think, I think I know what you’re talking about because I um I worked with a lot of international students here on campus, like um with just like outreach and like helping they make friends and etc, etc, and so I have a girl that helps me and she’s from Lithonia and she’s so much more acc successful um because she like comes up and she’s like I’m so and so and I’m from Lithonia and they’re like oh international but um if I walk up and I’m like hey I’m Jessica and I’m from Georgia, you know like they’re just like oh whatever you know like and so I think what you’re saying is there’s like ah…

(PB): They identify with you’re difficulties.

(PD): They identify with you and…

(PB): Yeah…

(PD): It’s and you kinda like like get in this circle a lot easier than if you’re perceived as an outsider.

(M): Yeah where as if you were an outsider American or whatever it may be um you just whatever, learn as you go, good luck

(PE): I like what PF said about um English being more, Americans being more prone to error and accepting of it because when I was in Spain yeah I’d make a mistake you’ll correct correct and be like stop speaking Spanish without blah blah blah but when I was
in England, even though we both spoke English and used different slang I was never once corrected, I never corrected them it wasn’t really a big deal to say well I don’t use doupe when I talk about the trunk of a car I just understood that I’m guessing he meant that when he said that word and he just kept on going. But I feel like when someone is trying to speak English I will correct them but not to much cause I don’t want them to ah get discouraged

(M): Mmmmmm.

(PE): Whereas it’s a different language they’ll be like this is wrong this is wrong this is wrong this is wrong.

(PB): And sometimes you lose the the point of the conversation if you correct them and correct them and correct them you lose the point of the message of what they’re trying to say and I don’t wan to inhibit them from trying to communicate with me in that way either cause I was traveling with two French girls and a German guy and for a while ah um they felt like they were messing up quite a bit when they were speaking English but I didn’t mind at all because I would try my hardest to sort of understand what they were saying ah would maybe expect the same from someone else just so that when we’re trying to communicate you know you just don’t lose the plot because you can’t speak every single word right. Um so yeah I mean I guess that was my point is that um as an American I did find myself becoming more accepting of of their trying their trying their best to speak English you know without offereing to many corrections than at any at some point um they did say to me like we wish that you’d correct us more because we we are thring to learn and I would just say yea I know but I just hate like telling you that youre wrong and what to do but if you want that then I’ll tr harder to be that way.
(PE): I usually would just rephrase it do you mean this and this and they’d be like oh
yeah

(PB): Oh ok so that’s actually a pretty good strategy instead of being like wrong and this
is right it’s more of just like.

(PE): Yeah.

(PB): A round about offering of what what is actually correct.

(PE): I think the one thing was um you know how we learn like you’re speaking Spanish
they say like for computer you just say computadora well in Sapin it’s like arainador and
I kept on saying computadora outta like habit and they just got really mad at me. So
yeah….

(PB): Oh no!!!

(PE): And I’m just like this is what I was taught.

(PF): That ah but that’s very European though they want you to resay it the correct way
cause I know French they you’re like I know you know what I’m saying and they just be
like no and you’re like.
(PA): It depends on the country too. It depends on the country because in Germany oh they didn’t even care they got upset at me because I was getting so upset about using the articles correctly they were like no no no no no no you’re not you’re you’re way to formal while I that was also cause I was in Bavaria so there’s like droch up north and then in the south you speak in the Bavarian dialect and then Germany also like there are so many different dialects and so many different words I learned the alligoy dialect which it’s this tiny little town that’s like it’s just an hour north of Switzerland um but anyway but they were very like you’re trying to hard. You’re trying way to hard and then and they have this um sterotype of the that, you don’t want to go to France.

(Group): Hahahahahahaha

(PA): Yeah you don’t wanna go to France, they’re not going to be, they’re not going to be very happy when you don’t know France.

(PF): Even the south French are very different from northern France cause we were in the south were all the farmers were and they would tell us like just the difference between simple things like ordering coffee they’re like oh they think they’re all fancy but they were nicer about it but still.

(PE): I um I have German roommate that’s um doing study abroad for the semester and we’re just alking about that today, she’s like yeah, if you come to Germany and you don’t
know German we don’t really care cause it’s a hard language so if you made a mistake
I’d be like oh my gosh I heard the word dog, I’m happy I’m happy.

(PB): Hahahaha

(PA): Um cause they have the whole the articles so it’s dar ve das and then depending on
like for feminine masculine and neuter and all of their frie cases and everything they’re
like we just say da like you speak so fast that you just hear a da in the middle of the
sentence like if you were writing up papers or you know whatever the formal language is
you just and then they have all of their slurs and stuff and it’s it’s so much more
developed than all like our our um I guess slang U.S. kinda talk and all that there are so
many different dialects in Germany that if you go from like alligoy up to like Berlin
sometimes they can’t understand each other.

(PD): And that’s um that’s a funny story is that the host family that I was with they’re
both from Columbia and um the guy the older man he ah he was missing so many teeth
and um his from like ah his Columbian farmer and this older man and he’s like used all
these words that I didn’t know and like he would always he couldn’t hear so he was like
yelling at you too and I was just like oh my gosh like it was just like I don’t know what
you’re saying and you’re yelling at me and I have like, I didn’t know I was doing anything
wrong it was so it was so scary but like then my host mom would just start laughing and
she would be like he’s just asking you how you slept but why is he yelling and so…

(PF): But my roommate said that about me when I was on the phone. She was like I
thought you were always mad and then I just figured out that’s just the way you speak
and I was like…
(PD): Yeah yeah..

(PF): I don’t feel like I’m yelling cause if you want me to yell I’ll yell. The volume is very different and the way people perceive it.

(PD): I think we got way off topic.

(M): No that’s fine, that’s exactly how this is supposed to be. I want it all whatever you want to tell me. But do you guys have a certain time you need to be gone? I think I said by eight in the email. Is everybody ok if we stay a little bit later? Ok, we’ll keep going then. So kinda talking about soft skills and some of the definitions that you guys have given um I’m gonna pass around a list if you’ll just kinda pass around this list down there at some of the soft skills that we’re gonna be looking at here tonight and that we’re going to be focusing on. So this is the list of soft skills and attributes required by employers for recent graduates um that studies show are considered desirable among employers so before going on your study abroad trip how good were you at using these specific soft skills on the list? Maybe there was an instance where you had to encounter kinda like team work skills maybe when you were working with um the vet and his clinicians you know did you really develop in maybe the team work aspect of soft skills or the critical thinking maybe PB like you talked about working on the farm do I walk all the way across where ever I’m going to you know or can I sit here and maybe think about it myself um another thing might be initiative maybe taking that initiative to say hey I think I’m gonna try to solve this problem on my own or I think I’m really gonna try to talk to this person today and really see what the communication barriers are or whatever it may be um or oral communication, critical thinking problem solving like I couldn’t I can there were some kinds that traveled with me when kinda we were all trying to get on the
metro at the same time and everybody trying get off and if you’ve been to Europe
you know it’s crazy it’s the hustle and bustle of it especially like in London or Paris
and this women on the intercom talking to you in a different language and you don’t
know what she’s saying but I need to get off at this stop and I think I heard part of
what my stop sounds like and I’m gonna get off here you know and you get off and
you don’t have your people with you and you’re like oh boy what do I do you know
the critical thinking problem solving I’ve got a big problem I don’t know the
language I don’t know where I am and I’ve got to get to that stop that everybody
else is at, what am I gonna do if they’re not there you know did some of these soft
skills kick in for you did you learn some of these soft skills or how good were you at
using these soft skills prior to going on your study abroad experience?

(PE): Ah for problem solving I met up with a friend I was studying abroad in Barcelona
and we decided to go to Paris and we didn’t know French and the airport was not what we
thought it was so we had to figure out how to get from outside of Paris into Paris to our
hotel and then we had like a book of fifty phrases and the guy we asked to order
McDonald’s was to find wifi and he told us it didn’t exist. So haha

(PB): Oh no…

(PE): So we had to figure out how to get to our hotel how to navigate this city where you
don’t know the language at all and then of course it’s the French so no one wants to speak
English to you. Ah we ended up thinking on our feet we went to the most expensive hotel
we could find and we walked in because we knew americans were gonna be there so we
ended up asking them if they knew where a McDonald’s was and they gave us a map, a
directions a number to call just in case we got lost and stuff so that was really a good idea
that we came up with.
(PB): Yeah.

(PE): It was a tough three days.

(M): That sounds like there were a lot of problem solving skills in that whole deal right there.

(PE): We chose McDonald’s cause McDonald’s has free wifi around the world that was us thinking on our feet.

(PA): So was that extra like beyond your study abroad like you went.

(PE): Yeah we went on a weekend.

(PA): So ok yeah cause I did that also and I was in Costa Rica this summer and I ended up staying for another two weeks um with two other students that were there they were there before hand doing um helping um a student with her Ph.D. research and then they stayed later after study abroad as well and so I stayed with them and we we hopped from city to city but everything in Costa Rica is with buses and the buses usually come on schedule but ususally not I mean I asked someone at the bus stop hey when’s the next bus and they’re like um ahhhhhhhh and they just kinda make something up like yeah in the
next thirty minutes. It should be here so so I mean we just kinda played it by ear like the whole two weeks after that um they um after our study abroad ended all the other students were driven by a bus to the airport and they dropped us off on the side of the pan American highway and we walked to the closest bus stop to the first bus that was going in the direction of San Jose um or not San Jose we went up to Canyans um but yeah we kinda just yeah we just kinda played it by ear and then we went took the next bus to the next city we wanted to stay in and we walked up ah found the cheapest hotel in the city and just played it day by day so that was I guess that was less of time management cause we just kinda played it by ear so I guess problem solving like I said just trying to find your way around.

(PE): But it’s fun cause all we had was we got to the country and we had a place to stay and then from we had like three days and we just made it up from there.

(PA): Yeah yeah and then the um one of the guys was saying with he was fluent in Spanish to so that kinda helped haha um while we were traveling the country but yeah you know like I’ll find some place to stay so as long as you got find a hotel.

(PE): Only sad part is that the only thing we could eat was McDonald’s ha or a croissant that’s the only word we knew in French.

(PB): Oh no hahaha.

(PE): So we would get in line and be like croissant croissant.
(PB): They do have good croissants though.

(PE): It was really good.

(M): That’s really funny.

(PD): I think the one that stuck out to me was self management skills because um I got really sick while I was there I got ambisas which is like dysentery it’s terrible like Oregon Trail kinda stuff, I felt like I was on the Oregon Trail. But um so like you know just trying to like and I’m a terrible sick person so just like oh my gosh I’m gonna die you know like super dramatic hahaha but I mean so just like being in an foreign country and being sick and like just like I guess like and still trying to ah like complete your internship you know cause I ended up being sick for like four weeks and ah lost a lot of weight and it’s so you know what I’m saying, that was that’s what stuck out to me so now if the situation comes up or if I’m like sick or I’m tired I’m like well at least it’s not as bad as that you know and so you can be like oh I can do this I you know.

(M): Bring it on.

(PD): Yeah.

(PC): Uh I can talk about self management cause when I was in Taiwan my professor didn’t ah give me a very specific ah time table when to get to her office when did I leave
so sometimes I will I stayed up late I couldn’t get up early I would try my best to try and
get up at nine o’clock in the morning I went there at about ten I she didn’t notice though
but at the end of my internship there one of the ah of her assistants told me ah this
professor it’s really good, she didn’t really care about how much time did you spend in
the office and and and my professor was actually amazed that I didn’t give him anything
to do why is he coming so early I said ah I thought it was necessary necessary to come on
time and be I never left before three o’clock in the afternoon but she she always told me
ah you can go swim because they have student pool and I bought a season pass you you
should go swim. You should really go swim. I try my best to stay there but it ah it helps
though cause sometimes when she suddenly have something she couldn’t reach me
because I didn’t have a cell phone so she always said it’s good that you stick to your time
table that you stay from a least from ten to three with without a break I mean what if we
really need you sometimes and we couldn’t find you and self management I guess is one
of the thing that the employer maybe they will not enforce it but they still value it if you
stick to your own discipline.

(M): Anybody else have anything to add?

(PA): I mean I guess we were talking about self management and like taking initiative
when I was in Germany um it was pretty much I just followed around Dr. Dire on his day
to day it was like seven until well really it was like seven till like nine there was a break
in between in the day like a morning and an afternoon shift but other than just coming
along with him it was kinda up to me however much I wanted to learn and how much I
will then could understand in German and the well the broken German and English we
communicated together um so then I then learned from a dictionary and I ended up
getting a little journal where I wrote down like words and then as much as we could
communicate back and forth about whatever the medical issue was then I would try to
write that down and then so yea it took me a while I guess to get um acclimated to like
the place and just finish getting overwhelmed with the culture and everything um so but
then after that I kinda gave myself a schedule of like making sure or then I guess I guess I
got a schedule of waking up early in the morning to get my coffee then reading the
newspaper with my dictionary and then um using my break midday to do something other
than just sleep cause I was exhausted but um like going then explore the city and then
like on a bike and then like coming back um but yeah it’s just so taking that initiative to
make sure to try to learn as much as I could for the time I was there.

(M): Good.

(PF): Um when I was in Greece the first two weeks I was there was the internship and
then classes started so I was really nervous because I didn’t speak Greek and the classes
start after the internship so I had to I mean they they it was an American farm school so
like they they all spoke English but the internship part like they didn’t really that much
cause most of the students there also spoke Greek. So that was interesting because like I
had to be there at three in the morning um ot work in the vineyard before the sun comes
up and once the sun comes up you take a break and then I’d work in the green houses and
the guy I was working with mostly didn’t really his English wasn’t as good as another
one but he wasn’t there that often so it was like a bunch of sign language it was fun it was
interesting we got work done and he didn’t like he would teach me how to do something
and then he’d leave and do something else so it’d be the whole day in the vineyard just
like pruning or then he taught how to use the sprinkler system and he’d just send me he’s
like ok go and then he’d tell me make sure you do it every thirty minutes and I’d be in
there organizing just doing random stuff cause he only told me to do like to water the
plants so then I had to like clean up and stuff but…
(M): Hmm

(PF): It was interesting, but.

(PD): I don’t know about initiative but sometimes when you have a problem but nobody knows you have this problem I think sometimes you have to step up and tell them that you have this problem for example when I was in Taiwan we didn’t anticipate this problem they didn’t have a school bus and da da da dining halls close down during vacations so for the forty-two days I was there I didn’t have any meals served in dining hall and I still stayed in the student hall it took me um it will take me forty-five minutes to walk from my dorm to the um the gate of the school where they have all these vendors but it’s a up hill so I had to walk two miles everyday to the vendors to buy food so I couldn’t take it anymore two miles one way it’s two miles it’s four miles everyday. Whatever I eat I couldn’t make up the energy so I ask my professor for help I say I need a bicycle but then I forgot about that’s up hill. So everyday I really have to burn a lot of calories to ride a bicycle up hill after I eat I just sit on the bicycle the bicycle would roll down hill or I didn’t have to use the pedal once it would just roll down hill all the way. And sometimes, well I mean being Chinese there when I have problems its easy for me to communicate with them but I think, I couldn’t remember whether it was Carolina or Dr. Kanemasu said that its lucky for me being Chinese studying in Taiwan or if its an American who speak ah who speaks little Chinese studying in Taiwan or China you have big problem communicating with people especially no I mean if you have problems when you are working or studying you can talk to the professors because they speak English but if you have problem lets say if I am sitting if I didn’t speak Chinese and it was weekends so only maybe the custodians or maybe the ah um the hostel stuff but there it’s gonna be very difficult to communicate.
(M): Ooohh PC you make nervous to want to go study abroad in Taiwan.

(PC): I know you are going to Taipei?

(M): Uh huh.

(PC): I know people there ah speak good English.

(M): Ok.

(PF): And it’s cultural too cause I remember ah when I went to France we had a dinner with some other students they were serving and stuff but like I saw on the board that it said wine was six euros and I was like that’s like twelve dollars for a glass of wine so they’re like oh you want one and I was like wait I’m gonna pay extra I don’t understand how this is working and they’re like if you want you take if you don’t you don’t and I was like I’m on a budget I kinda need to know ah yeah and they’re like no if you they just repeat and your just like ok well I’ll just be on the safe side I won’t have any and then at the end they just split the bill evenly.

(M): Mmmhmmm.
They just split the bill evenly so I was like I just paid like yeah and I didn’t have any so I was like what I was upset or like or sometimes like I do this with my friends all the time it’s cool with them like I wanna try multiple things but you don’t wanna buy I mean you can’t eat every multiple means so its like you order one I’ll order another one and we’ll split it half and half. And then I I went there I was like oh let’s do that and there’s only one student who would do it with me like the other students were like nope no I kinda want to have my own I was just like ahhhh then you only get to try one thing. But um luckily she she was there she was really nice she’s the one I travled with when we went to the weekend in Spain but it was frustrating cause it’s like why is nobody understand like like the concept of a budget was like foreign to them they’re like oh we’re in France just….

(PA): These were other UGA students?

(PF): Yeah yeah the UGA students yeah yeah.

(PA): Cause I was gonna say yeah with like team building skills I guess when I was in Costa Rica with a lot of other UGA undergrads and then there were also vet school students just an interesting dynamic but um but yeah we had to do like mini research projects and so we were just split up and kinda set free cause we had three or four days to collect our data and stuff and so we had that aspect if you go on study abroad you’re with other students and not by yourself and there’s def. team building skills there.

(PF): Yeah the only one who wanted to share with me, she was from the Philippines she was she was a UGA students she was a grad student she was the only grad student
only one in my department and she was from the Philippines and so I was like ugh I’m so glad I was so happy and.

(PE): That’s weird.

(PF): I mean I…

(PE): Most people I know would are that way are that way you know would share the food. MSB Trip.

(PF): You’re thinking about minorities, minorities don’t care about sharing.

(PE): Oh ok.

(PF): and like but other people are like oh my, which is also cultural I mean Greek in Greek cultural too like they would they’d order a bunch of appetizers and we’d all just eat from them where instead of everyone having their own mean and like this is mine.

(PA): No we did that in Costa Rica all the time there were so many fruit drinks to try too it was like wait what did you get ok I’ll get the next one on the list and then we’d all just pass around the drinks.
(PF): Exactly.

(PA): Maybe we just had a really good group I don’t know.

(PF): Yeah.

(PE): That’s what I’m thinking cause usually I I just go out with my friends just the other day they weren’t all minorities but we went to a Chinese restaurant and they were like don’t the same dish.

(PA): Yeah.

(PE): They were like the food ok take a spoon of that one a spoon of that and…

(PA): Yeah exactly.

(M): So you think maybe when you go by yourself there’s more critical thinking problem solving that type of thing that’s put into it then when you travel with other students that are like UGA students or other people maybe you build more of a team building skills that kinda thing.

(PE): I’m not sure…
(M): Maybe more…

(PE): I would’ve much rather wanted to travel with other people cause I did mine by myself and I was like never again. Cause I would never wanna go back. This is scary I was the only person that was like in their twenties in my whole like lab place so everybody be like I’m going home to the wife and kids I’m like ok what am I doing and then like the roommates I had at like the apartment I had they all left cause school was over so it just ended up me being there and I was like ah crap. So…

(PF): Yeah I think you need at least one other person if you’re gonna do something but I mean even when we went on the France trip it was I think we were only ten and there was little groups cause there was um me and another group of people from my department and then everybody else was animal science so they already knew each other cause they were all in the same major there was like juniors by now they’ve done research with each other so they all knew each other we didn’t really know them and so like they would go off and do their thing and we’d go off and do our thing we’d cook for each other and so that was it was nice to have our little group and then we had our weekend they did something and we’d something else and then in Greece I was the only UGA student and the first two weeks were rough because I was by myself I mean there’s they were in their finals so nobody really wanted to hangout or meet and then they left and then the new students came but they came I was upset about this too they they had to do a sailing trip that was like before it was an extra thousand dollars but I told you they just tripled the price so I couldn’t go on that and when one of the students told me he told them I couldn’t do it so they gave me a scholarship I was so upset cause I couldn’t have done it either but like my mentality was not to ask for help it’s just like you just make it work but whatever um so they did that while I stayed for a week working again in the fields and um but there was three three Illinois students at the University of Illinois
another three Virginia Tech students and some of the things I felt that I was like ugh do you guys feel do they feel the same way and then I find out we all felt the same way that kinda like got us closer together when we did our like trips that were included in some of our classes and stuff we bonded as a unit but if I was by myself I mean I didn’t really venture off to far cause I was by myself if I did get lost or anything when you’re by yourself you have to do one of two things either figure it out on your own or like use a map and just figure it out or two just like speak to someone and do that and that’s always scary.

(PA): I think there’s also a difference of I was trying to think of what to say but my two trips I was pretty much by myself in Germany, even though I had um the vet and his wife and the assistants to talk to everyday but then in Costa Rica it was UGA students we were even on UGA’s campus down there for a while and then you know there are like four or five other trips so there are students there all the time but um what was I gonna say um what were we talking about.

(M): **Team building skills, problem solving.**

(PF): Traveling by yourself vs. traveling in a group.

(PA): Ha sorry um the oh oh when you have a trip that like you’re saying you’re trying to find something for yourself to do or when they are all when you’re kinda on your own having to plan it out and I guess that that initiative vs. a completely planned out study abroad trip.
(M): Mmmhmmm.

(PA): then I was in Costa Rica it was like (snapping) everyday like we had a lecture everyday at a certain time we had lunch at a certain time and we had to get up at a certain time and I think we had we had those few free days for research and stuff um and a day here or there but I kinda didn’t I mean I had to plan an exploring around when we had lectures and stuff but it was pretty much planned out for me and then I the students so there’s students to compare it to and to just oh hey we can go out for tonight but then in Germany it was very independent and and I guess kinda just dropped into that real world situation.

(PF): In France it was like that.

(PD): Which one did you do first?

(PA): Oh I was in Germany first and then this past summer I was in Costa Rica oh and that was another thing when I came back from Germany and Dr. Thomas and Carolina would ask me how it was and I really liked it but there was this point and time I know they tell you about the highs and lows you go through um when you get to a certain place but there’s this time when I did feel like this weird loneliness and homesickness and then straight forward then they were just like oh I mean that’s because you were by yourself you have no other people of your age group to communicate with.

(PE): Same thing.
(PA): And so that’s why I was like I was that’s also why I was another reason like Costa Rica is next so something that’s planned out with one other student.

(PF): Yeah I was backwards France was the UGA trip and everything was planned out and I loved it I had so much fun and like we only had one weekend that was free because the other we had optional but everybody decided to do it so it was kinda like built in that was our one free weekend but it was really different because we lived downtown and we took the metro to school everyday so and we made our dinners on our own so some people would go out to eat but me and the other three girls cause you know you form the little clicks so then we went to the grocery store and we’d cook with each other and like we’d each with each dinner always always because lunch was pretty much provided and breakfast they have a snack thing were they would get full so we’d have breakfast lunch and dinner and then we’d make dinner for ourselves whereas in Greece I was on campus with a tiny little campus and like because the meat the way it was set up it was like the cafeteria only served food at certain hours so you had to either you had to go or you just don’t get fed you don’t get fed and you don’t live in the city and then travel to school you live on campus so if you leave campus and you’re like on your own.

(M): Mmmhmmm.

(PF): And like the the trips first of all we had night classes which sucked cause it was like night so you have all the morning but you can’t really go anywhere cause if not you’ll miss your meal and cause the meals were it was one in the morning with like eight and then like two o’clock and then eight o’clock like that’s like you can’t really ever go anywhere and come back in time for a meal cause you’d miss it.
(M): Mmmhmmmm.

(PF): And then um what was I gonna say there was something else, we had night classes and then oh the trip that were built into the program were on weekends so you couldn’t even plan your own trips because the weekends are trip that are planned for you and then during the week you have class and meals that you’ve already paid for and you don’t wanna miss out on that cause you already paid for it.

(M): Mmmhmmmm.

(PB): Hahahahahahaha

(PE): I think I wouldn’t have taken a day off cause…

(PF): I mean one day we did miss like we did miss a meal and we went to the mall just to walk around um and the whole bus thing was so different too cause in France they give us a little card and it was for everything for the whole week free and it was just like chupe chupe we can go anywhere it was fine and there you had to buy your own little stubs and they only lasted like two hours and ah they don’t really check it it’s kinda like an honor system but then silently these like the bus will stop and there’s like police schedules will appear outta no where and they will be like where’s your stub where’s your stub and you’re like oh my God, it was crazy.
(M): So it sounds like you guys definitely learned or kinda enhanced some of the existing soft skills you may have had before ou already took this trip, what would you say after returning from your study abroad trip how have you used these other soft skills and are you better at using these skills because of your study abroad experience?

(PB): I only just returned last week so I’m still be a little bit more time before I guess I'm quite sure about that I guess.

(M): Ok.

(PE): I appreciate knowing English a lot more.

(PA): Hahaha very true.

(PE): It’s like if I could know one language and only be like monolingual I choose the right one. So um…hahahaha.
(M): Ok, so do you guys think maybe taking these study abroad trips did it kinda instill in you some of these soft skills, did you learn these soft skills haven taken a study abroad trip, would you say?

(PF): I fell like you might practice them more but I don’t think it’s you learn them per say cause I t just feel like you’re put in a different world, yes there’s transferable skills, but you just ah I don’t wanna so you develop it cause I feel like everyone has these skills in high school I mean I don’t know, I think they’re pretty basic.

(M): Maybe you kinda refined them would that be something you would say?

(PF): Um I would just say that you practice them more.

(PE): I wouldn’t say I practiced them I think I was unable to use some of these skills like I couldn’t be the leader because I didn’t speak enough Spanish I wasn’t one hundred percent me cause I I first went to Spain and then I went to London and I was there and I was like oh my gosh I sound like an idiot when I was in Spain cause just I couldn’t say anything and I’m over here just yapping back and forth and the first day I got there I met up with some family friends and I was gone to the movies this and that and I was like oh my gosh.

(M): Much better?
(PE): Not much better…

(M): Being able to speak the language?

(PE): Not saying much better I was like oh gosh I didn’t realize how…

(M): Ohhhh, gottcha.

(PE): How limiting it was, yeah.

(PA): but I think because you have to try so hard in another country to do that communication then once you get back to the U.S. you appreciate it so much more.

(PE): It was so much easier yeah.

(PA): So then you are I think I think I became a little bit more assertive.

(M): Extroverted?
(PA): I guess a little bit more extroverted yeah um even with speaking with other students because you had to have such a problem in another country or because you are like getting outside of your comfort zone kinda thing and even meeting new students and um so then I you know coming back to Athens and then there’s still students that I went on my study abroad here so then its I don’t know, you’re kinda forced to get to know them.

(M): Mmmmmmm so maybe the initiative maybe that soft skill you kinda maybe take more of an initiative yeah cause you realize how privileged you are by being able to communicate.

(PE): Yeah cause we went to a hostile in Barcelona and it happened to be that everybody there was an American college student so everyone was like oh my gosh you’re from the U.S. I’m from Boston I’m from California and it was like within meeting them in five minutes it’s like let’s go down to the city right now or let’s go we’re going biking tomorrow, let’s go let’s go let’s go beach and it was had it not been in a foreign place we prolly wouldn’t have said hi. So I guess you learn to take more initiative.

(M): And where were you when you did this? Spain?

(PE): Barcelona.

(PF): The only roommate we had in Barcelona I went when we went in Barcelona was ah she was Canadian she’s like I don’t know why they think we talk it was so funny cause she said about and we were like she said a boat and I was like ok haha it was hilarious.
(PE): We had Australians too everybody in the hostile just happen to be English speakers it was really strange cause everyone is all ready to speak their Spanish and they were like oh you’re from up the street. Haha

(PD): I really like what she said about you didn’t feel like all of you because like that was how I felt when I first got there because I mean I spoke Spanish but I was not confident in it to you know to like go into this like you know if like if someone asks me about myself I’m gonna make it like two sentences and you know to answer the question versus like in English I might tell you this five minute long story.

(PE): Did you find yourself going on left tangents and stuff about farming?

(PD): We took a class together hahahaha.

(PE): Jessica has a little story for everything so I can just imagine her if she was in Ecuador I wanna tell this story but I don’t have the words for it.

(PD): Exactly Exactly, and so um very talkative person and weather that’s a quality to my credit or discredit it is what it is I suppose but just to like realize that and I’m like I I never mind you know and it’s it’s it’s you take it for granted and um but it’s I remember telling my host mom I was like I was like I really do talk a lot normally cause she she talked a lot and she was just like wanting me to talk back and I was just like.
(M): I don’t know how to talk to you.

(PD): I have no idea you know, so I don’t know.

(PA): Well I guess kinda not really with the soft skills but with languages and things like I my mom speaks fluent German she’s from Germany and I learned German I guess slightly when I was growing up and then I took a class here but there was never that push to like actually go out there and try to tell stories in the language other than just that getting by and it took me a while through being in Germany to finally like really push myself to do that and now that I’m back in the U.S. and it’s a little bit easier to I mean I guess that they say you don’t really learn a langue until you’re forced to say it so I’m I guess I know more conversational terms now and that helps but I think also just that push to not worry about not saying things wrong cause I would also be worried about that in front of my mom cause it’s like I don’t know she expects me to find it but then um yeah it’s easier for me to try…

(PD): I I think so too because um I went to Peru before um I was like fifteen before I took my first Spanish class in high school and I just remember like the older like college kids and people we’re so glad that you went to the foreign country first so you can like see the need and like and I know if I hadn’t gone to the country I would’ve just sat through the class and just been like whatever but because like I had been there I was like wanting to absorb like everything the teacher was saying you know so I think that’s really cool.

(PF): And I think it depends on your comfort level being cause I I don’t think I mean yes you’re not one hundred percent yourself but I don’t think that’s necessarily bad because you’re not supposed to be your I mean I don’t feel like that way I feel like you’re
supposed to being learning you’re observing you’re not supposed to be like I mean if I
don’t know I think if you were yourself one hundred percent like just talking or whatever
you’re not really there you’re not doing what you’re supposed to be doing which is
observing and learning. You know?

(M): Mmmhhmmm.

(PA): You have to have that level that you’re comfortable enough to ask questions cause
then I could’ve just sat there and watch my uncles do things cause my cousins are there in
Germany but ah but just like enjoying myself I guess or just being there and observing
but then you have to go outside and you know ok I need an explanation for this you have
to get to that comfort level.

(M): Alright well I have two more questions for you guys and then we can kinda
wrap things up tonight I know we’re kinda going over the time so the next question
being what about your study abroad experience was so unique that it contributed to
the development of these soft skills if anything? Do you need an example?

(PD): Like how is it different from the question before.

(M): Well I guess you guys kinda answered it a little it but I’m wanting to know if
there’s something that was so unique maybe there was one situation or maybe there
was one day outta your experience or maybe just meeting some person what was so
unique about it maybe that it developed some of these soft skills or maybe you
practiced them a little bit more, is there anything that you wanna add to the last question that made it a little bit more…

(PC): There was once when I was in Taiwan we went to a tour that the professor arranged for us she had two or her assistants graduate assistants to bring me and ah a student from El Salvador and ah the students cousins who are form California who went out to eat pigs feet so it’s ah well we couldn’t com I mean I could com with both groups but they communicate with each other so we were sitting at a round table and we were very silent we were sitting there and the ah American friends they were staring at the pigs feet they didn’t know how to start and there were pigs intestines on the table that was served as an item and ah it was dead silent so I had to it was a time I had to come and say you know what I I would facilitate the conversation I will translate for the Taiwanese students and I would talk back to the ah El Salvador students and their their California cousins and I never spoke a single sentence of Spanish when I talk to them I talk to the student from El Salvador I try to use every single Spanish phrase I could use all the things I learned from ah La Fiesta when I order things when I call call the waitress to come I say Senora could you I want this and that all the things I could say in Spanish was Gracias and cause I will use every single thing I could try just try o get them to communicate with each other then I find more common grounds among the two groups they both I mean they all like basketball and so did I so so we kinda get the conversation started.

(PF): I think that’s key to the whole sign language or like just using anything possible cause that’s how like I felt when I didn’t know Greek you know you just make it work so it’s not that I feel like you’re not I mean yeah you can’t prolly doesn’t translate one hundred percent but like you’re still involved but it’s just you’re I don’t know I’m ok with that as long as…

(M): Maybe a lot of body language nonverbal communication?
(MF): Ok, very good, alright so one of the things that I was really interested in when I was doing the research um to make up these questions and to kinda really put together my thesis were um there was a recent study that I came across um that reported that foreign language capabilities and study abroad experiences were not perceived as critical skills needed among these employers that are looking for recent graduates to hire, they really value more of an internship experience more so than a study abroad experience so um how would you respond to this? Would you say maybe that a study abroad experience is just as important as an internship or maybe an internship while you’re abroad is even more important that just an internship here and is more valuable and employers should consider it more than just an internship that an American student would do in the State? How would you respond if they said that foreign language capabilities and study abroad experiences were not perceived as a critical skills necessary.

(PE): It depends on the well for starters I think an internship in the United States I see a lot of office work and coping papers so was it really did you learn much not really so I think we went abroad and experienced a different culture you might take more than from what you did sitting around an office.

(PB): Maybe it also depends on how um active your employer is in the global community and how much they value business interactions with other countries and how adapt you are at communicating using other languages or even just other culture and that kind of stuff. So. I think it’s very valuable I think it certainly changed my life and opened some doors
that um that wouldn’t have been open before um I’m very glad I did an internship abroad and I would I mean I think an internship is very important but I also think a study abroad experience is quite valuable for an employee. Definitely.

(PF): I agree I think that I don't think there’s a single job now that really isn’t dependent on something global I mean we’re globalization like we’re global now there is now with the world wide web and with everything so there really is no excuse not to be a global citizen as well and understand these different cultures I man I don’t understand why you’d want to limit yourself anyway. I mean there’s no there’s no loss.

(PB): There’s no loss certainly just something to be gained by traveling abroad.

(PA): Especially if even if the practices are very different I mean that’s in itself even if you’re not learning exactly how it would be practiced in the U.S. you’re being able to compare that and contrast it and bring back what you learned how they do it differently in another country cause there were a lot of different things that I realized they did at farms in Germany were completely different from the larger ones that they have here but um but as for study abroad I mean it’s a completely different but it has it’s own benefits in a different way I mean were talking about earlier with being in an internship you’re more by yourself and study abroad you have that you usually have that group other student aspects and I I don’t know I mean it really depends on what trip you’re going on too and how much practical work you have like the study abroad I went on we went in and actually did research and we had hands on things everyday and even if you weren’t working on an actual in an actual business and operating some like some sort of um company or business than you’d still learn those practical skills I think you could actually make it to learn more things simply because you’re not tied down to that one internship that you’re doing when we were in Costa Rica the study abroad was six weeks um and
every I think we went to seven different places like we hopped around to different cities
and they all had different focuses we worked in the zoo for one week and we were in a
chocolate farm for one week and we were in a coffee farm and we um we were doing
research on the east coast and we were on the west coast the next week so we got a really
broad view of the different practices all related to conservation biology um so I think it’s
def beneficial.

(M): That kinda fired me up when I read it I mean as much money as I’ve poured
into study abroad myself as much time as I’ve spent and I feel like I’ve definitely
learned some of these key skills here that employers are looking for through
studying abroad and I think it just kind of a narrow mind set I mean whoever
reported that must have never completed a study abroad there’s so much to gain it’s
like you say there’s nothing to lose only to gain so to me I personally it was more
valuable than just an internship whatever it may be there’s so much that you learn
while you’re abroad so much a about different cultures I mean it’s just a whole
different type of education all in it’s own.

(PF): Not only that I mean if you’re planning on expanding if you have someone in house
that has that experience I mean yeah it’s more valuable than having to start from scratch
and learn all that and we already talked about how you people are more perceptive when
you’ve already tried I mean I think there’s a lot of language I think when you try people
are more receptive so you saying I don’t think study abroad is important you’re saying I
don’t think trying to learn about other cultures is important I mean it’s a slap in the face I
think it’s insulting and rude and ignorant.  But to mean all it says is that you’re not
important that’s what it says I mean it’s not important for me to learn about you and
that’s not even what this country’s about so whatever.
(M): That’s a good way that that’s one I was saying before I mean it just goes to show that they just have no experience apparently.

(PD): I think there’s a big difference though in like the internship that we have taken than like say the study abroad like here study abroad class been apart of where we just did more just like watching and not like the actual involvement and so I think that the skills were learned from being involved where as like we’re just like standing on some trail in the middle of the rainforest oh yeah there’s a bird and there’s a tree, you know that I don’t think that’s no where near as as valuable I mean yeah the culture that’s cool you know and you do gain something from it but as far as like these skills are concerned they’re they don’t result from passivity.

(PA): I’m gonna argue with you about looking at birds in the rainforest because it depends on what you’re studying we did so much of that we did birding everyday we went through the rainforests and um learned things like that and then they and it depends if that if you wanna become an environmental biologist. Hahaha

(PD): Well I mean I’m just saying like if you’re like going out and searching for the birds then like that’s like critical thinking and problem solving but if you’re just like following along the trail…

(PA): It depends on what study abroad you’re doing.

(PD): Exactly that’s what I’m saying so I’m saying that like your level of involvement determines your level of developing these skills.
PF: Especially in Ag. We talked about all of these transferable skills and like they were using John Deer tractors over there so obviously it’s important to the economy and just economy policy wise I I one of the most valuable things I learned was not value but it was just important how the European system helped farmers and how they’re markets are completely different how they market certain things how they I mean the perception of food was completely different and why what’s wrong with eating something completely different that’s the only way to the path of innovation is doing things differently but there’s like the same abuse the same I don’t know thing you’ll achieve the same results.

PA: So yeah I guess that’s based on the thinking the way we do things in the U.S. is the only way to do it that it’s the best way we’ve been farming like this for so long why would we want to go and see what other countries are doing but yeah I mean how else do you know I I guess it takes that self reflection um aspect like we actually I can’t I believe I didn’t think about this before we talked about this a lot on our study abroad that it takes you seeing something done differently to actually reflect on the way that you have been doing it and realizing maybe I’m doing it maybe you do decide oh our way is obviously better but a lot of times you realize oh you know they they go about this in a completely different way maybe I should be altering my mindset about it.

PB: Maybe that’s also commentary on the sorta national view that maybe people still view study abroad and leaving the country as to expensive for the common college student and so it’s like the would value an internship because most can get an internship in the country and that’s a practical work experience and maybe the majority of people and employers still view study abroad as not applicable to the majority of students so they would say well we’re gonna we’re gonna put more value on a practical work
experience within the country than putting more um value on a study abroad experience
because maybe it isn’t for everyone maybe every one can’t do it

(M): A lot of them think it’s like a vacation that students take so they don’t look at it
like a semester exchange where you’re going and you’re immersing yourself in a
completely different culture and having to learn these skills that usually learning in
an internship possibly too you know or you’re doing your semester internship or
whatever it may be abroad a lot of time they think students go abroad for a couple
of week s and it is true I’ve do it too and it’s a lot like a vacation but you know when
you completely such an immersive experience like you guys have done and been
there for several weeks at a time and really immersed yourself in that culture and
having to learn like use some of these skills just to be able to get along on your own
that’s where I see it becomes more valuable than just an internship here in the
States.

(PE): I had ah a some conspiracy theories’ I had an econ teacher in high school and his
little tangent was how a lot of the stuff that we say is maybe is to expensive to study
aboard not really what kinda taught since we were younger for school nothing that we
kinda just stay stay stay stay stay. And you don’t get the opportunity until you’re like in
college and by then well people are like well I’m actually pretty fine living here after
eighteen years had the beach down here the mountains over there they don’t really
everything that would be in Europe they have so they don’t really wanna leave or not
Europe but you know around the world so it’s a lot of because we're not exposed at a
younger age by the time we get to an age we are able to leave we don’t want to. Cause I
have a lot of friends who are like I don’t really want to I don’t have a desire to.

(PF): Which was shocking to me but at but it’s whatever…
(PE): Then I have some friends who are like let’s go right now but.

(PF): But I felt the same backlash from my department heard when I was trying to get credits transferred um cause I just was so frustrated with how with it’s a UGA program it’s super easy it’s a breeze like it’s like ahhhhhh it feels really good to just sign up and go if it’s not a UGA program it’s a hassle and a half it’s just awful my department head said that too like we just view it like you know if the department head he’s he’s from Zammerano to he’s not American either so he’s foreign it’s like obviously you understand like cause he’s form Zamerano anyways but he he’s viewed more diversification that’s why the process was such a hassle because if the college and the university thinks it’s so important and that recommend everyone to do it why do they make the process so burdensome for anything that’s not a UGA program I mean we’re partner schools of the exchange program not something completely random and weird and different but hhhhhuhhhh so I felt that even with educated department even though it’s an educated person they know so it’s just I don’t know.

(PE): I will admit some study abroad are vacations.

(M): Yes.

(PE): Cause my friend in Oxford he was on vacation.

(PA): I def agree there is that stereotype that oh you got to go abroad there’s also that stereotype towards people who do go abroad they’re like oh you know your parents paid
for you to go to Europe every year all the time you’re just getting to go on vacation over
the summer and it looks good on your resume it’s like I wish it depends on your program
and what you’re doing yeah I wish that my parents paid everything so um yeah I mean
it’s all situational.

(PE): We had class two days a week we had to write a paper and that’s all he goes for his
major now it’s just like I had half of these already write so that he can just go to his class
on Wednesday leave the country and then come back on Sunday.

(PF): But I know some programs make it so that isn’t the case cause I know I was talking
to another girl who was like we have tests every I think it’s Friday night just to make sure
that if students study abroad like travel during the weekends they can’t really go to far
because they have to be back by Monday so like and if they have a test Friday night so
they really only have like two days to stretch out so I mean but those are the professors
that are in charge of the program and encouraging them not the ones who have to approve
everything but that’s UGA programs so it’s prolly really easy.

(PA): It is great to have that vacation aspect you know to have a day for snorkeling I
mean we learned about like tide poll diversity but you have to have something to.

(PF): But one of my um high school teachers used to say that to was that the things you
retain are the things that you enjoy you’re not going to retain an awful experience you
had abroad I mean that’s prolly something you wanna block out but something you enjoy
you retain you’re gonna talk about with your friends you know like so.
(M): I can remember going with UF to Costa Rica I mean I kinda wanted some days how in the world we got this trip paid for because it was so much just vacation and fun I mean we did surfing one day we did zip lining through the rain forest another day but we kinda did those things to break it up to we spent a lot of time at Earth University we built a biodigester with a family um that didn’t have any type of electric couldn’t use a stove I mean they had nothing just dirt floors it was just.

(PB): Pretty basic.

(M): It just very primitive living it was just a very interesting experience but it does help when you kinda mix those fun things in to to kind move the experience along.

(PA): it helps with those team building skills you have to actually interact with the other students..

(M): If you can have some fun before you get into a situation where you have to have those team building skills I’ve kinda got to know everybody and had a good laugh it makes it much easier I think. Well the last question guys is there anything else that you ant to add do you have any questions for me before we leave tonight? Well thank you so much for participating tonight I really appreciate you guys giving up a Monday night.
Focus Group Number 2: Semester Exchange Abroad (Group Travel) Transcriptions

(M): Ok you guys ready to get started tonight? Alright well my name is Sarah DeLoach and I’m getting my master’s in Agricultural Leadership I have to go through this spill I’m sorry ya’ll um but tonight we’re just gonna basically have a conversation if you can forget the recorders are there and just pretend that we’re just family kinda hanging around the dinner table tonight um as Dr. Fuhrman was telling you this is gonna be my thesis project and I’m interested in seeing the impact that study abroad has on undergraduate students in a College of Ag and just see if you learn anything from it if you don’t learn anything I mean what experiences you did have and how it’s impacted you and your studies future career goals all those kinda things um I’ve done quite a bit of study abroad myself I’ve done a good bit of Europe all the way basically from England to Greece and everything in between um England, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Greece Austria, Italy all over and then I’ve also done Morocco and then Africa a little bit of that and then the summer I came to UGA I had the opportunity to travel to New Zealand and Australia and China as well and then I’ve done Costa Rica a little bit of all over so study abroad is a huge passion of mine and I’m just kinda interested to see if you guys gained in the area specifically of soft skills so that’s one thing we’ll be looking at tonight and as we get started if you’ll just go around the room, lots of us here, if you’ll just go around the room and say your name and where you completed your semester exchange.
(M): Ok.

(PA): Ok, um I’m PA and I completed my semester exchange in Brazil.

(PB): Um I’m PB and I um did my exchange semester in Vienna, Austria and I also did a month in Costa Rica.

(PC): I’m PC, I did my study abroad in Zurich, Switzerland.

(PD): I’m PD and I studied abroad in Vienna, Austria.

(M): Ok well very interesting quite a vary here. Um Well the first question I’m gonna ask you guys to answer, tell me about your decision to study abroad so describe some of the factors that influenced this um including or for example the location of you study abroad trip any individuals that maybe influenced you to study abroad um finical incentives and then also maybe future career goals. So what made you decide you wanted to go abroad?

(PA): Um well I actually started I been I done a semester exchange in Costa Rica um I just always know I’ve wanted to go to Latin American I always wanted to learn Spanish and then when I got to UGA um the romance language department um has a really good
track to learn Portuguese I mean from Spanish so I wanted to go to Brazil but I didn’t want to take anymore semesters off so I was gonna do some soil research I wanted some hands on experience and I talked to Dr. Larry Morrison Forestry and there’s this really cool grant where anybody that does a full semester exchange um the US Government and the Brazilian Government have an agreement and you get a range of money like I got the least outta everyone and I got 2,000 there were students that got like 5,000 just for doing an exchange it’s not like a competitive thing and then I applied for another scholarship as well so it was a fully funded trip but I really wanted to learn Portuguese and I knew that Brazil was a leader in sustainable agriculture um and that was really my passion and I knew that we really don’t have a much of that here in the US and that Brazil would be a good model to look for if I wanted to work in Development.

(M): Ok, interesting. And guys we don’t have to go in order like we did the names just whenever anybody wants to chime in just go for it for example if PA says something and PC you’re like ya that made me think about that too or that was why I really wanted to go abroad or I disagree with that I mean you can kind a not yeah yeah with each other but feel free to chime in this is just a conversation we’re just chilling tonight I mean I’m even gonna prop my leg up here we’re just chilling. So and if you want more pizza water anything just help yourself, so.

(PC): Well my decision to go abroad was completely different um I was only planning no doing um food science department does a Maymester in Cortona, Italy and I really wanted to study abroad um I didn’t really didn’t really know what I didn’t like research or anything I just got an email from the College of Ag. That said hey do you wanna study abroad over in Zurich. And it was one of the only study abroad I’d ever seen that wasn’t this Costa Rica trip or sorry not Costa Rica sorry Cortona trip that involved food science and it came with a 3,000 scholarship which was nice ha and so um that’s why I had no idea about it before I got this email. It was due like 5 days after I got the email so haha I didn’t even tell my mother I’d applied for it and so after I got it haha so I really was not planning on studying abroad before I did.
(M): So when did you tell your momma that you got it?

(PC): When I got the email that said congratulations you’re going to Switzerland. Hahahaha I called her and said hey mom.

(Group): Laughter.

(PC): I'm going to Switzerland this semester I think I mentioned it to dad in passing a few months back. Haha that was a fun surprise.

(PB): My main motivation for study abroad I think I just wanted a new experience I think I was a little bit I think it was a phase of life how but um I just wanted to do something new and I wanted to see new things and I really what I really wanted to do was go to a Spanish speaking country and um become fluent in Spanish but um when I found out about Boku exchange semester and the 5,000 grant that went with it that was kinda my decision to just go with um going to Boku and going to Europe which I felt would be a good new experience anyways because I’d already been to Costa Rica and Nicaragua so that was my main motivation was financial reasons.

(PD): Yeah it was similar for me um my ah dad did a lot of stuff in Germany in College and law school and everything so I already kinda had it in the back of my mind I’m gonna go to another country and um I didn’t really wanna go for a full semester um but ah and I wanted to go like PB to a Spanish speaking country but specifically I wanted to go to Spain um because well I I lived in Mexico so I kinda felt like Latin American thing
like been there done that so I cam in and I talke
d to Carolina about the options to go to ah
Spain and I knew that I wanted t go to Eruope and then she was like well se don’t really
have anything in Spain um but we have this you know hefty grant from FAMU ah where
you can go either to France or um Austria and just let me know um and and France it was
a smaller town a um and I even though I’m my French is still way better than my German
I chose Vienna because it’s a bigger city it’s ah a bigger culture hub than the place in um
France and I also um it was very highly rated by MS Carolina she said that the public
transportation was awesome and that um it was really really safe and good water and so
on and so forth and um so I was kinda like yay col and then like once once I kinda got
into the nitty grity part of it I started to realize the difference between a study abroad and
an exchange and um I I didn’t I didn’t know that kinda coming into it the differences um
but I’m so glad that I ended up doing an exchange and not a study abroad um just because
it would’ve been a whole different experience.

(M): Very good so it sounds like you guys all have kinda different reasons sounds
like financial was a big thing to I’m um doing the international certificate program
though the Master’s or the um graduate part of the international certificate
program through the college of ag and that def wasn’t my first pick either I’ve been
to China and I was like never again at least for a long term and Carolina said oh
well there’s 2,500 dollars and then Dr. Jiang he’ll fully fund you to and then I get
my assistantship check while I’m over there too and they’re like oh yeah you know
it’ll be funded and I’m like yeah sounds great yeah you know there’s originally we’d
kinda talked about Chili, Argentina maybe something like that I wanted to go to
South America, it’s the only continent I ain’t been on except Antarctica. So I really
wanted to go so bad but there just wasn’t any funding so and for me Taiwan here I
come so you know and nobody speaks my language so it should be interesting so
we’ll see how that goes. Um my next question for you guys is these days it’s been
said that soft skills are desired among college graduates seeking employment given
your background and future career goals how would you define a soft skill?
(PA): I have no idea what that means hahaha.

(M): Do you know what a soft skill is?

(PB): Isn’t just like basic communication like how you communicate with people um it can be like pretty basic right?

(PC): It’s not like facts like things you learn in class it’s like the in between things, it’s not like quantitative I think like you can’t like take a test on solving problems or going able to read maps or um…

(M): Ummhmmm.

(PA): Would it include things like is it stuff that you can’t really be put a label on either or is it for example would speaking is it like oh she’s really good at interacting with people in this area or would it be like she speaks this language or could it be both?

(M): Yeah, I’ll go ahead and pass these out. I didn’t want you to look at them until later um but these are the soft skills that we’re going to specifically looking at tonight and this will kinda give you an idea of what soft skills are just in general and um the ones that we’ll be kinda looking to see maybe you gained in this area with study abroad. So do those seem like soft skills like things um that you know do you think maybe you learned through study abroad?
(PC): I did definitely.

(Group): Yeah.

(M): Well these are some of the ones that have been listed by recent employers that are considered most desirable or necessary from recent college graduates. So how good were you at using these soft skills prior to your study abroad experience?

(PA): Um really I’d say the it’s not that I was bad I don’t think I had a lot of exposure a lot of experiences with these soft skills um because these are all kinda like social things and I avoid being social but when you’re by yourself in a different country, you don’t get to avoid it anymore so it was kinda like not necessarily the these make you good and before it was bad but just a matter of like study abroad will draw these things outta you and like push you to you know build on that.

(PC): I kinda had the opposite experience here I’m very out going and I can talk to any person it’s a good thing and a bad thing because I’m like my mother in that aspect I’ll strike up a conversation with someone at the grocery store um but I found that in Switzerland you cant do that they don’t like it. Maybe that’s just where I was but I had um I don’t know over there it was I had a completely relearn how to interact in social situations um cause I have no problem walking up to people staring a conversation I love giving presentations but I was the only person who genuinely enjoyed giving presentation um but when I got over there and I had to like walk into this class where these kids have been going to school together for three years they all knew each other and um I’m stubborn also so I wore my cowboy boots everyday.
(Group): Oh gosh, hahahahahahaha.

(PC): I don’t care but it was just being in that atmosphere of I don’t have to learn how to learn to communicate how they communicate my style isn’t going to work like they’re not so I think that oral communication was a big thing that I didn’t have to learn I had to adjust.

(PA): I guess it makes you more aware of these things to like oh I don’t think like do I have good oral communication skills do I work well in a team that’s like the weird stuff they put on teacher evaluations and you’re like uh what does that mean it like really puts the meaning to these words and you’re like well I def work better in a team now and I have an example and you know I can look at these things and I can give you examples from each of them this is how this got better because of study abroad um where as I’d be like I know how to talk to people sometimes those where problems in math like I guess I’m good at problem solving.

(PD): I would take it a further step like not just oral communication but just communication in general because I found myself like understanding what other people were saying but not necessarily because of the words more because like body language and context and like people meeting um and so I I mean coming into it I feel like I already had these kinda developed because of having already lived abroad before and like a different language and stuff um but also just like I mean I’ve been in customer service for a long time working and it’s just kinda like I guess I’ve been conditioned to anticipate people and learn their body language and so um I think I think that gave me um I guess like an advantage cause like I said like I didn’t necessarily know what they were
saying but I can anticipate by like the context um and I think that’s a very big a very big thing because you learn about body language um and like somebodies facial expression which can often you know say so much more than just the oral communication part of everything and I I don’t speak German I speak very little German and being put into a situation um in Vienna were I don’t know the language it was something that we really had to rely on and also just learning the signs and the subway and like just anticipating what um you know what something means when it comes on the intercom I I always said the nitch was the bad word. Like I don’ know what the bus is saying and but it says nitch and I know that that’s just a bad that just means that something is not going right so I’ll just turn back around and go another alternative.

(M): Did you ever learn what nitch was or.

(PD): Yeah ah.

(PB): Not.

(PD): Yeah lots of fun.

(PB): I felt like I actually communicated less like oral communication I kinda had a similar experience to I was very self confident when I left like to go to Vienna and when I got there I became very self aware and very like just I felt like everyone was always looking at me and I felt very self conscious about it because and then I don’t speak
German I speak less German than Alex does and so my oral communication I don’t think improved at all but other ways I communicated were um strengthened.

(PD): I would disagree because like part of oral communication is also talking to somebody who isn’t who’s not fluent not necessarily fluent in your own language.

(PB): Right, that’s true.

(PD): Like necessarily fluent in your own language and I I think that is something that you developed like being able to talk to nonnative English speakers.

(M): Definitely. Anybody else have anything to add?

(PC): Having to learn to be patient with non-English speaker who were speaking English. At first I don’t know cause normally when someone says something like you hear what they say I don’t know they get a word wrong and you’re like oh did you mean this just casual but if someone is not an English speaker and you say that they get very offended so I’ve learned not to correct people.

(M): Just kinda had make out what they’re saying?
(PC): Yeah that that took a lot of connecting the dots of oh you actually mean this you don’t mean this.

(M): So it sounds like just besides the communication aspect you guys had to take a lot of initiative to maybe on your parts to kinda read that body language or to be able to kinda go outta your way to learn to speak to people or kinda adapt.

(PA): Or to find somewhere to live.

(M): Maybe a little leadership in there to.

(PA): Hahaha yeah.

(PD): And also just initiative not to just close yourself in your dorm and just stay there initiative of like ok it’s Sunday everything’s closed I’m on the verge of being depressed I’ve gotta go do something I’m in this beautiful city where you know people come an vacation and I’ve been given money to come her I need to seize it and learn more than just like the school part um and that that took a lot of initiative and also I guess just stepping back and being like patient about everything and um I guess ah trying to I guess like trying to um give them a good impression of your country and the area that you come from and try to represent you know represent it well instead of just you know some old American stuck in side all the time not open.
(PA): It’s a lot of pressure to like be the representation of your country.

(PD): Especially when you feel awkward doing everything.

(PA): Hahaha yeah.

(PD): You know? I mean even from you know getting off on and off the subway like they’ve been doing it so since they’ve been doing it you know since they’ve been able to walk and it’s our first time so we don’t you know it’s not part of our subconscious to stand right in the middle as the doors open you know you get bumped into at the grocery store and people reach in front of you to get cheese you know they smash your chips with ah with the toilet paper and it’s just that’s just it you know breath breath breath.

(PA): The initiative for me might be the biggest of these skills that you definitely get just going on study abroad is so much initiative even through UGA is a school where study abroad is really pushed and encouraged and you do have a lot of support especially on exchange you have to look a semester ahead and it’s not like I mean I don’t know maybe in you Europe its prolly a little bit better but you think Brazil knows what classes they’re going to offer next semester trying to get a credit approval form together the year before you leave you know trying to find funding for it trying to you know buy your tickets you’re by yourself in this and you have to organize everything way before you get there
and then when you get there and then adjusting back and so just that but while you’re there like I mean you arrive as an exchange student and I had one contact and that was Clivia and like you’re surprised how few people do speak English and you know you really kinda thrown into it right then and you have to find ok where am I living where is the grocery store where’s the bank how do I get money um there’s just so many things that are in the very beginning and then as you continue to go out and the four month exchange you don’t really have it’s great but really it takes a full three months and you constantly taking initiative and then you have like one month of enjoying your reward from three months initiative.

(PD): Just getting to school is initiative in and of itself because it’s not even just like finding your way to school it’s like getting a transportation pass learning the transportation system learning where the bus is how to get off the bus in the first place you know it’s.

(M): It sounds like a lot of critical thinking and problem solving maybe too?

(PA): Definitely!

(M): Seems like you guys where thrown lots of not maybe problems so much but like why did they reach in front of me to get cheese, why is she smashing my chips I’m fixing to pay for these things, you know, that kinda thing?
(PB): Especially when we were traveling on vacation to new cities every three days we’d change cities and then you’re dropped into a city you don’t have a GPS you don’t have an iPhone you have a map. You have to find your hostile you don’t speak the language you don’t know anyone like that I think that was when ever I had the most critical thinking problem solving skills really um applied and practiced so.

(PD): And looking ahead.

(PB): Yeah and planning everything so…

(M): With the classes and all that kinda stuff like you’re saying to finding the funding before you even go you have to use a lot of these soft skills to be able to get everything together.

(Group): Ummmmhmm.

(PC): I think I was spoiled being in Switzerland cause the Swiss are very punctual they have everything planned um and that made me have to learn how to plan because the train says it’s gonna be there at 1:16 it will be there at 1:16 it will not be three at 1:17.

(PA): I heard in Norway oh sorry.

(M): No they’re like that there in Norway.
(PA): If the bus is not there on the dot if it’s one minute late or one minute early the government will just pay for you to take a taxi somewhere you send your taxi bill to the government. I wanna be a bus driver there!

(M): We flew black from Oslo into the States I can’t remember what airport but we were there like a whole hour earlier I think we caught a tail wind I don’t know what they had on that plane but we were there a whole hour earlier than what we were supposed to be in the airport I mean and they the wheels are gonna leave the runway at a certain time they’re gonna leave then. If you’re late you’re left. Interesting.

(PD): I think let’s see teamwork was definitely another one um it also it kinda redefined what I what I had perception of teamwork before hand um because like you don’t really know you don’t really encounter any of the cultural differences until you’re in a group where you are doing a group project with people of like a different culture of a different language and I think that was when I was encountered or I encountered more of the cultural differences beyond just like the superficial you don’t drop trash on the ground it’ like the fundamental differences and like.

(M): Working people.

(PD): Yeah and how they think and um it made me appreciate you know the way that we do it but also just like the other girls that went to UGA as well that was a lot of team work coordinating with each other helping each other leaning on each other we became
family because there was no other way to do it and so it was a lot of like yeah teamwork
and then self management like getting yourself fed that’s like yeah.

(M): I would think that the critical thinking and the problem solving the initiative
would kind of all go together.

(PA): Yeah I’d say that in the teamwork like that’s def one where like you do kinda get
forced in it but it’s also the one that’s the hardest or at least for me was the hardest to
actually make work like even oral communication like there are language barriers but like
you somehow make it work but team work like I remember in Costa Rica I was in these
classes with these kids that and they were all like sometimes it was first year students
sometimes it was second or fourth year students and we’d be assigned a group project
they’re all about group projects at this university and I speak good Spanish like I would
converse with them in Spanish and you know I’d be like what do you want me to do and
they would insist that they were gonna do all the work and they would just like discount
because you’re foreign you’re going to slow them down they’re going to have to explain
I never really got to participate in a group setting um there I remember I went back cause
I was considering transferring there the next semester I was gonna like move there for
good um and I went down for an interview and there was a one on one interview and then
there was a group interview and again it was like all these it was like three other students
from Costa Rica trying to enter into this university it’s another team solving thing and I
would try to speak up and I would try and participate in what they were doing because I
knew I was being watched and graded on this and I was really trying really hard and then
my one on one interview was right after that and the guy who was in charge of the study
abroad like in charge of me while I was there was doing my interview to and he switched
to English and he was like so what happened in the group interview? He called me out
from the beginning what went wrong and I said I don’t speak that good of Spanish and he
was like yeah you do why did you let them run all over you and I feel like and my
experience is like you will get kinda pushed over and pushed to the side because you’re foreign you’re going to slow them down you’re different they don’t wanna they don’t really wanna take the time to do that they like you as a person but working especially in a team not just interacting socially I didn’t really have as much of a problem with that but working in a team for me was like I had to really exert myself to make a team work that way.

(PD): I definitely saw how the Americanism in me of like let’s get down to business like here’s the framework and I’m just gonna get it done like it just needs to be done and I’m gonna get it done where you know some of the other people were just like bopping around like well how are we gonna enter all this data and specifically it’s supposed to be and we’d spend hours upon hour of them like you know just going on and on about you know the problems the little bitty itty things and fighting over it and I I could see that Americanism in myself just get it done just put it down get it done even though it’s like like bare minimum and I know it’s cold of me to say I don’t care but it needs to get done and I’m getting it done you know and um yeah I think PB had a very similar experience with teamwork classwork teamwork.

(PB): With Austrians and other exchange students it was terrible hahaha and I think it’s just the way we gather information and then the way that we process things so like I was like yeah I’m very task oriented so we need to make a presentation I’m going to do slides 1-4 you do 4-6 blah blah blah everything had to be thought through just like I feel like they would talk through things over and over but not really ever get anywhere no you have to get somewhere I want results I want a product um so that was my experience with that very different yeah.

(PC): The Swiss get things done.
(M): Oh goodness).

(PC): I’d be like you guys are fantastic um yeah the only reason it was a little awkward or group work in our labs and our partners you know we’d divvy it up just like we do here you know you do that I’ll do this you do that all perfect made a dropbox they always did what they said they were gonna do on time sometimes before.

(M): Good! I’d like to go to school with the Swiss.

(PC): They’re fantastic hahahaha.

(M): Hmm well very cool well having been talking about soft skills and defining them a little bit further and you guys kinda explained some of your experiences with them would you agree that these skills are necessary to complete a study abroad.

(PC): Absolutely.

(PB): You can’t study abroad if you can’t do these things.

(PA): You can’t or at least some of them.
(PC): You can’t have a successful job if you don’t have these.

(M): So to be able to study abroad, which of these skills would you say are proly the most important, maybe the top three?

(PC): Self-management would be number one.

(PA): Initiative and critical thinking.

(PD): I’m on the communication side; I think communication critical thinking and self-management.

(PB): I think initiative self-management and critical thinking but oral communication comes in really close on third.

(PA): Although I think initiative can fall under self-management it’s like you have to make yourself have initiative.

(PB): That’s true that’s true.
(PA): Like I said for me initiative was like the biggest thing but importance for people who are going on study abroad I would maybe put initiative as self management as part of that and I think this critical thinking and oral communication are some of the top three.

(M): Are we ready to move onto the next question? Alright so what’s returning from your study abroad trip, how have you used these skills or other soft skills just in your everyday life maybe applying for graduate school um just working in teams here on campus in different classes and that kinda thing um what do you think, how do you use these skills now that you’ve kinda come back from study abroad?

Would you say that they’re furthered developed maybe, that you’ve noticed them a lot more? That you’re better at using these skills? Same?

(PA): For sure um I think especially like initiative and leadership team building things those are things that like I remember in high school like when you’re building your resumes your supposed like being in these clubs and you’re supposed to take a leadership position it was like oh my God being vice president of a club is so much like whatever um and then I studied abroad um and after Costa Rica like I felt like I developed those things there but didn’t really transfer it back here and then after a second go in Brazil you know like involved in clubs I was always involved but never leaders never taking initiative and I cam back and like I’ve been like I’ve had like two really big projects that I don’t think that def involved soft skills there’s one um like putting together starting this sustainable tailgate and like interacting with people and like setting up this whole thing involved lots of communication getting funding from the office of sustainability and then another one doing food literacy at an after school program this semester where I’m both like so I’m just like I’m going and volunteering but actually like I have this idea I’m gonna make it happen and doing it and so I think that’s something I really wouldn’t have done without so much having to take initiative and that experience without before.
(PC): It definitely helped me appreciate these skills um I I ah def think I had them before I went and I def. had to use them while I was there um but before I studied abroad you know I I enjoyed leading I enjoyed taking initiative but it was after I got back I realized wow I take a lot of initiative I can get things done um I didn’t really realize it before like I guess potential I couldn’t use these skills um and so yeah just coming back just in class I was I knew how to communicate better I would say because I had had to learn how to break things down and communicate things in several different ways and so having had to do that on a much more sever scale in a different language I could do it in English within like a certain project better if that makes sense, so in a different aspect yes definitely.

(M): Mmmhmmm.

(PA): It definitely changes your perspective it just made me think about um kinda I mean stories so in Brazil I took this really great class it was called Governmental Politics applied to Agribusiness. This was I’ve never taken a macroeconomics class in my life um I haven’t taken an econ class since high school and I knew nothing about agriculture in Brazil politics in Brazil any of that um and so you’re sitting here in this class and you just like and when you’re in the moment you just do what you have to do and you’re like God this class is really hard I don’t understand anything and then you come back oh my God I’m glad it’s school why can’t I figure this out and then you get back to the US and you’re taking organic chemistry which you’ve been so afraid of for so many year if you put it off till your very last year of college and you’re like piece of cake I got this because I just did macroeconomics in Portuguese and that was impossible and you figure out what your limits really are because you don’t think like oh my God I’m gonna put like you’re just thrown into it and so you go way past your limits without realizing I and you get back and you’re like oh I know how to like manage myself now I know how to manage
my time I know how to think critically in my own language this is great you know.
Hahahaha.

(PD): I don’t have any instances I can recall of any instances like specifically where I’ve been like I developed that in Austria but I think more than anything it ah like I don’t know like I’ve always felt like through my academic career have felt like my grades don’t reflect me and um soft skills are definitely my strength and you know it’s it’s hard in you know in academic system like ours where it’s so like test driven and you know number drive um you know for me to think like I know I know I’m better than this I know that I’m better than what my grade reflects and then be able to go to another country with a different language different culture different everything and be able to survive and do well like it gave me so much confidence in these soft skills and it helped me come to terms with like my ability to do things and my I guess my strength so it made me realize maybe I’m not like maybe I’m not like sit down and do a multiple choice test person I’m definitely the you know put me in the middle of no where and tell me to solve a problem and I can do it you know and I would I’d you know I much more confident in that now I wish that there was some way I could represent that to people that look at my resume haha or something you know I wish I could say got a 4.0 in soft skills but um hahahaha

(M): Get the leadership certificate.

(PD): I guess I guess so.

(PB): When I came back I was done with school so I graduated and I didn’t I haven’t been back in undergrad so I don’t really have an instance in school setting that I’ve used
it but I was def. able to tell people like in job interviews and PD helped me come up with this but um explained to them how much initiative and self-management it takes to study abroad um that you really are on your own and that you have to figure things out and that you have to manage yourself and manage your time and manage your resources I guess that was a big think I guess I learned was how to manage resources so that’s something I guess I have for really taking away a viable moment is how to manage money better that sounded like really poor English better manage my money um yeah I think I guess I guess the main thing I’ve come away with I mean definitely these were all improved but I can’t think of a single instance where.

(PD): It’s definitely a conquering thing like you know we hit up six countries in six weeks like let’s go like bam I can make it I can make it somewhere like…

(PB): It’s true…

(PD): Put put me like on standby going to somewhere I will be able to go there and come back because this is my culture this is my language and I have a cell phone with the internet on and I can get free ketchup I know…

(Group): Hahahahahahahaha…

(M): So you guys think you’re definitely better using these skills after completing a study abroad?
1978  (Group): Ummmmmmmm.

1979

1980  (PD): Or just yeah even realizing that those skills exist.

1981

1982  (PA): Yeah.

1983

1984  (M): Some of you are bench science like food science you’re not really with leadership wholly moly we take so many like personality assessments and figure out who’s a green who’s a blue that’s soft skills or in groups…

1985

1986

1987

1988  (PC): Or in groups we have one group project every class we are always working in groups even though it is a bench science.

1989

1990

1991  (M): Mmmmmm good, that’s really good.

1992

1993  (PC): Hahahaha teamwork.

1994

1995  (M): Well there was a recent study that reported that foreign language capabilities and study abroad experiences were not perceived as critical skills um or critical experiences needed among employers. How would you respond to this?

1996

1997

1998

158
(PC): We’re going to drop you off in another country and let you figure things out.

(Group): Hahahahahah

(M): Critical in the since that they don’t value an international experience like you guys have had a semester exchange as much they would a summer internship where someone is just potentially just filing papers for the big person on top.

(PA): Well I will say I eman I think this is definitely very valuable but depending on the job um and this is something I saw in Brazil and we’re not even as much this way but like the kids there that major in agronomy those classes aren’t like here college is not you know find yourself find what you want to do college is you’re going to be an agronomist when you graduate you are an agronomist and you they say like you’re going to use this in your job and so it’s very applicable and so if you’re in the kinda job where they need this technical knowledge you know I mean if they need you to have an internship so that you know what their system is like an dyou haven’t gone somewhere I mean I understand their point and I understand like for me like the kinda jobs that I’m looking for as someone who wants to study abroad and has valued that I don’t want that kinda job I think you are a much more well rounded person and you do gain so many skills and it’s super valuable but I do understand the employers perspective that depending on what their what their deal is if they’re just like ok who’s a better employee in general someone who has studied abroad but who’s better for this job not necessarily someone who has studied abroad so I mean if someone has gotten an internship in this field never left the country and someone has studied these field at an internship or did a study abroad somewhere but doesn’t have that skill set I mean I can understand that.
(PB): I would probably bring up um just how global our society is now and the global economy um and just needing to have that perspective of like understanding different people and different cultures I think that’s something that I walked away with was I really feel like I have a better understanding of the world in general because I didn’t only meet Austrians I met people who are also studying in Austria so I really feel like I have a better understanding of how the world works and um how different cultures can be how they can still interact and work well together um so that’s prolly what I would say.

(M): This kinda fired me up I mean as much like money as I’ve poured into study abroad throughout the years I started as a freshman in study abroad I was like what do you mean this isn’t as important I mean I see your perspective to and I didn’t really stop to think that until actually the last focus group when some people were like it depends on the job and I’m like you don’t understand I mean these skills right here and you’re going to need this just to walk from point A to point B…

(PA): Yeah.

(M): You know I mean there’s so much to it and like you say with a global perspective a global economy I mean you could talk to anybody all over the world with Skype the click of a button I mean you know and actually see them to not just talk to them and it’s free you know so…

(PA): I’d like to know kinda the context of that because I don’t know like they don’t value it as much and what I don’t know I’d like to kind ah hear their perspective on it because to me I don’t know like don’t see it as critical as having specific like I get that but not seeing it like they really don’t value it. You know how much do they value it? You know maybe they still value it maybe just not that much I don’t know…
(M): It was actually a study that was conducted here at UGA through um it’s not your food and resource econmic it’s just you’re ag economics I guess is the department that department and somebody they were looking to see what employers wanted from recent graduates.

(PA): In Ag or in general.

(M): Just in Ag.

(PA): Ok.

(M): It was to the college of ag and different employers in the ag community and they were looking to see you know ok we’ve got all these recent grads that you’re hiring you know what are they lacking what would you like to see from them and these were the skills that were considered the most important the soft skills were the areas where the graduates were lacking that they didn’t have enough soft skills they couldn’t just talk to people you know this generation we have instant gratification with you know we can communicate with anybody at anytime anywhere look at anything we don’t have to wait on anything I mean it’s just a click of a button and we’ve got it.

(PA): In that case I’d say they’re wrong then. Because…. 
(M): So then we’re saying you know that an internship those kinda things harbor these skills more so than a study abroad experience.

(PA): Oh.

(M): And the study abroad they look at it as just being more of a vacation for students instead of an experience….

(Group): Ahhh you’re kidding…

(M): It does it does cause I’ve done some where it’s definitely a vacation I mean we were dropped off in China with an interpreter or somebody that was able the word has lost me right now…

(Group): Translate hahaha…

(M): There we go translator with us and a tour guide sometimes two tour guides that were able to speak English and Mandarin and then also the translator and we still felt like lost little puppy dogs I mean they don’t even have a written language I mean they do have a written language but its these little pictures you know and you’re like I have no idea how to say bano bathroom you just kinda have to shuck your pants a little bit you know I need to get here and I had a translator that could help me do all that we were completely lost and I can remember we caught a train in
Being or where were we were in Shanghai, Xi’an we were trying to get to Being and this train station was just gross I mean it’s the nastiest thing you’ve ever seen in your life and these little babies over thee the babies freaked me out I mean not babies in general but the babies in China did anyhow these babies would have these split pants on they didn’t have diapers on I mean they would just be naked from here to here and their pants were just split so anytime they needed to pee any kinda bodily function they’d just hold them out and these things are sitting all over the place in this train station and if they pee poop whatever they go in the corner I mean have you ever been anywhere where they don’t have a toilet they have a squat pot?

(PD): Yeah I’ve seen a squat pot.

(M): Oh my God yeah and they throw their toilet paper no matter the function into the basket so you’re facing the squat pot you’re squatting like this and as a lady you’re so afraid you’re gonna wet your pants you know and it stinks. So you had to shuck them off the first couple of times you know until you could master this art.

(Group): Hahahahahahahaha…

(M): You know and the toilet paper is right here in your face and you’re like yuck someone took a massive dump.

(PA): Ughhh…..
(M): You know anything like that and there was no toilet paper there was no soap there was nothing it was like no wonder you people have diseases I mean hygiene just ain't a top priority over here but I mean you know country bumpkin over here like oh Lord country has done come to town and you’re like oh my God. You think you kissed the ground when you got back you have no idea. So I mean that study especially it just I thought you’ve got to be kidding.

(PD): I think, I think it’s because of a lack of like being able to quantify back back back to my argument of so they say that they want this but hey doon’t value it like if only there was like the SAT of soft skills.

(PA): Yeah.

(PD): Then it might be a more desirable experience and you know I got a lot of that from some of the people in my classes before going to Austria that are like oh I feel like I could go to a study abroad and that's just like ah extended vacation and it’s not at all academic.

(M): Some of it ain’t a vacation.

(Group): Hahahahaha
(M): Yeah I don’t think so I mean seeing the Great Wall and I mean everything I mean anything you do is gonna have some kinda benefit people who go to D.C. for an internship they’re gonna get to see you know the Lincoln Memorial or something over there there’s some kinda benefit so yes it’s not a vacation to me it was definitely a lot of work.

(Group): Yeah.

(M): Just being able to maneuver around I gotta feeling Taiwan is gonna set the woods on fire and you know it’s just.

(PD): Even touristy things are a lot of work.

(PB): They are, I mean looking back on our three week travels ha that is like hind sight is looks better and it feels better.

(PA): Oh yeah.

(PB): When we were doing it I was like this is exhausting I love seeing Rome but I kinda wanna go home. But looking back I’m like I’m so glad I went to Rome but when you’re in it it’s so exhausting and like so mind I mean it’s such a work out for your brain.
(PD): Yeah it’s not relaxing…

(PB): I mean it’s not that fun.

(Group): Hahahahaha

(PD): It’s stressful and you know it’s a lot of navigating and walking I mean we did a crap load of walking you know when you have your back pack or you know like we had our role suit cases and you’re you know running from one bus to the next train or you have to check outta your hostile but your flight isn’t until this time well you know here you go with the luggage.

(M): Yeah and my thing to just learning a different culture like in China you couldn’t be like if they brought some of that food out and you’re like hmmmmm try again I mean they had this huge lazy Susan and at dinner they’d bring like 5, 10, 12 different dishes and they would put them on this lazy susan what we call a lazy susan and you pass it around and kinda shuffle that thing and get whatever you wanted you just pick it off with your chop sticks they fed us this beef option one time, and we’re at China Agricultural University meeting with their ambassador team because we were ambassadors coming from the College of Ag at the University of Florida so we’re sitting there and meeting these people and they’re bringing out all these different dishes and you get so excited that you see a dish and you’re praying it’s something I can eat and you’re like nope, try again. Well finally we got
what we thought was like a fried beef some kinda real thin sliced fried beef and later
on we found out that it was pig brain and that just…

(PA): Did it taste like beef?

(M): It had enough sauce on it and stuff it was ok. But I can just remember and you

can’t be like ughhhhhhh what is that?? You have to save face over there or like

Carolina was saying earlier those people will shut down completely. I think just

learning about, I mean that’s just one culture but you know I would think if the

company knew that I was a new employee at ta new company, just being able to

have that global competency kinda like an understanding that I’m not the only one

that thinks you know this way and that other you know really being aware of other

peoples perceptions and how they see things and do things different cultures would

be so much more valuable than sitting in some office filing papers.

(PA): Yeah but even beyond that one thing that I really have a problem with that study

about is specifically to agriculture people in agriculture I feel like especially in the US it

is so like you know my great great grandfather was a farmer I’m a farmer me as a girl

from the suburbs I’m not going to get into that agriculture industry you know production

side of things and I just feel like it’s very entrenched in the way that it is um and even

beyond this general developing soft skills like you get hard skills to I had no idea that

agriculture could be so incredibly different in every way production, markets, all of this

as between Brazil and the US it’s just like agriculture in the US is nothing like agriculture

almost anywhere else in the world so I think especially in the field of agriculture even if

you know and the thing is you can get even if you’re focused on production even if you

don’t care anything about sustainability or markets you just want it to stay the way it is I

think there’s so much to say for having a perspective of how do they do agriculture in
Brazil and being able to critically look at agriculture and I’d say that that's really really really important in something that gets undervalued a lot even from the facts we’re just trying to make a lot of money and grow out some more corn kinda thing.

(PD): But even it’s just like being able to look at a situation differently and like taking a different approach to some things and haha you know I’m I’m an environmental economics major so I mean a lot of my major is like oh well that’s good and everything but realistically it’s more efficient to do it this way um but I ah I think like the study abroad and that experience and like talking and like searching in your on way like a lot of…

(PB): Like opening doors that was quite difficult it really was yeah how do you open the door or the window to remember that? It was so embarrassing like ohhh I can’t open the door and Dr. Hauss’s class.

(PD): Oh the cultural difference class.

(PB): Yes, the professor asked me to open a window because it was really hot and this is like 50 or 75 people couldn’t figure out how to open the window, I am a smart person I am intelligent I should be able to open this stupid window and he made a funny joke about it and talked about culture and how little things can be difficult.

(M): I was a amazed at how people flushed the toilet I mean all over the world and the toilets just people just in general I got in Italy one it me when were well I had a clean one but we were at a gas station maybe it wasn’t in Italy, I don’t know some where in Europe but we were at a gas station and like you flush the toilet and it’s
just like the toilet seat would circle around and they’d clean it yeah it went around.

Anyway so this thing like circled all the way around.

(PD): Well it’s wet but it’s clean!

(M): Yeah or even like those things I don’t know if you saw them but they’re like little portable buildings you have to like insert money and you get then the toilet is like this big metal thing and then the doors would open and they wouldn’t stay shut for very long you had to get in there and do what you had to do and then get out unless I mean it was nothing to keep putting coins in there to keep the door shut I mean it was nuts nuts.

(PD): We got pretty good at finding the bathrooms either upstairs or downstairs in McDonald’s waiting for someone to come outta the bathroom and catching the door…

(M): Yeah because you have to have a combo to get in there.

(PA): Ohhh yeah.

(PD): yeah because I don’t know how they survive. I sear they’re camels cause they’ll go beer at lunch all the way until wine at dinner and not have a single drop of water or not have to go to the bathroom.
(PA): What?

(PD): And we’re just like chugging water all day long we’re like gotta pee hahaha.

(M): Yeah.

(PD): We’re like I don’t know where to go I’m not gonna spend a Europe to go to the bathroom.

(M): Exactly.

(PD): McDonald’s here we go! Hahahahaha

(PB): And Starbucks too American restaurants.

(Group): Hahahahaha

(PA): Oh my God public bathrooms don’t exist other places.
(PD): No, not at all. Neither do drinking fountains.

(PA): Yeah!

(M): I can remember Costa Rica we took a trip there with UF one time the hot water ain’t no joke there ain’t no hot water in Costa Rica I did get it at one place there was hot water and I think I was the first one of my little bunk people to get in the shower and I just sat there and let the water run over me just on the floor in that tub it was like ahhhhh hot water, I mean you’re hot as hell all day long everywhere else but they don’t have any hot water.

(PA): No, you could take a shower at noon though when it’s sunny out there then the water is at least not cold when you take it and then warm in the morning before the sun comes up and then it’s like cold water.

(M): Well let’s move on peeps the bachelor is on.

(Group): Hahahaha

(M): I’m not gonna lie alright so we have two more questions to get through um reflecting on your study abroad experience how did your education here at UGA either prepare or not prepare you for this experience? And what recommendations might you might make to better prepare students for study abroad in the future? That’ a loaded one, I can break it down into the first one and then we’ll do the second one if you want to?
(PA): Ok.

(M): So the first one again is reflecting on your study abroad experience how did your education here at UGA prepare you for that experience? Or not prepare you?

(PB): I don’t think I did a lot of critical thinking or problem solving before hand but I can’t really remember not in class I didn’t like because on my own in college and I’m figuring stuff out.

(M): Mmmhmm.

(PB); I don’t I don’t remember any classes going like oh I really figured out how to figure out a problem.

(PA): Not that it can really be done in a class honestly.

(M): So even the international classes like I took Dr. Navarro’s one of them classes international development and then another one with Dr. Duncan I saw you in Austria um this global whatever class it was seminar so you don’t even think those prepared you for something like that a study abroad experience?
(PB): I think Dr. Duncan’s global class kinda gives you an idea of maybe their educational style when you see all the different presentations.

(M): True.

(PB): So like oh this is kind show they format something or how they would present information so that could be learning how others communicate.

(PA): That a really good point that I haven’t really thought about I was just thinking how content and stuff cause that’d be a way that UGA didn’t prepare me but I’m not saying that it’s their place or that they should but education systems are so different in different countries and it’s just not just learning a new culture not just learning a new subject matter not just learning another language learning a new education system like classrooms are run totally differently in Brazil and in Costa Rica from the US. So I don’t know that they should have a class adapted or letting you know I think honestly the office of international education plays the role in I don’t think you need to take courses at UGA as part of your curriculum to prepare you for it I think they give you a descent amount of you now things are gonna be different and this is how you can prepare and I think that suffices the rest of it you just kinda have to figure out maybe just knowing like school’s not like it is here when you go.

(PD): Yeah well as much as you know I’ve I kinda say like oh that four hour cultural differences class that I took with Collen you know like oh that darn class.
(PD): It was painful but like when I got there I understood why she did it and um you know I like I had already been abroad before and so it was kind alike oh great tell me something I don’t know but them getting there whoa for somebody who had who has never been abroad you know has these assumptions about Europe you know I could see where that really does have value um I mean it’s a little bit of over kill like I understand why she has that meeting.

(PA): Mmmmmhhhhmmmm.

(PD): Were you there?

(PA): Yeah but I think I went in October or.

(M): And who had this meeting?

(PD): Collen Martiston she’s over yeah office of international education yeah. It was really well intended but yeah.

(M): Little much?
(PD): Yeah I mean four hours on a Sunday is a little bit of over kill.

(M): Oh yeah.

(PA): I didn’t go to that it was like an orientation thing.

(PD): Well she had a couple and one was like on Sunday um and that was rough but like like I said I understand like why she did that and I was mocking it in my head the entire time I was there but like once I got to Austria I understood ok well like you know somebody who has who does not have that kinda view um but I don’t know I UGA definitely like goes along on it’s own little ways and your you think that a syllabus is totally normal totally natural totally not.

(PA): Syllabus are the best thing I have in a class.

(PD): And then like your so what does it say on the syllabus?

(PA): Office hours, what is that?

(PD): So yeah but I yeah like PA said I don’t know if there’s anyway that UGA could prepare us um yeah.
(M): I would agree with that, I think we took a class to prepare us to go to China and Costa Rica. Costa Rica was a lot of fun, you know, the cultural differences were a lot, but not as harsh. But China, I mean, I was really glad I took that class because it kinda gave me a little bit of an idea what I’d see. But I don’t think you really know. It’s kinda like a Krispy Cream Donut; you know, it looks really good, but you don’t know how good it is until you taste it.

(Group): Hahahahaha

(M): So China was the opposite. It looks like it could be kinda rough, but you don’t know how rough, especially like food and bathrooms and that kind of stuff until you get there....

(PA): Yeah.

(PD): That’s probably a good thing.

(M): And you’re like holy moly. I remember I got there exhausted. I mean it’s like a fifteen hour flight over there and we left we graduated that day and it was the day they killed Osama Bin Laden so we had to call our dean when we got to Chicago. They didn’t even know if they’d let us go or not because they were so afraid the terrorists you know would attack the Americans and the American airlines. So we called the Dean got over there finally. I mean it was a forever long process getting
over there and then I got in a room with two other girls so we had two nice bed and
then this cot that may have been I mean it wasn’t as think as this water bottle I
mean it was like sleeping on springs so we’re exhausted and we um we like rolled
some paper with our names kinda you know said ok well we’ll draw for the cot I
said we might as well not even because I know I’m gonna get the cot as tired as I am
I know I’m gonna get the damn cot. Sure enough I got it I just squalled like I broke
down a squalled like a baby I can not sleep on this thing I’m so exhausted I can’t
even move like I just I don’t know what day what time.

(PD): Was this at the airport?

(M): No this is when we got in the hotel. Ummmhmmm in China and I was just
ready I mean 12 hours difference you know just your your clock was complete off I
was just like I’ll whip out my credit card and I’ll get my own dang room I need
something besides this little cot I mean it looked like it had the mange so I had to
end up sleeping with the lad that um I stayed in the same bed she’s a good family
friend of ours she’s like our Brice Nelson at Florida it was find but there wasn’t
nothing that could prepare me for that.

(PA): Yeah, hahaha

(PD): And everybody’s experience is so different to like you know like um another girl
that went with us to Austria like her her welcoming was so or her first impression of
Austria and what she had to go through was so much different than like Amanda’s for
example.
(M): Mmmmmmm that’s a good point.

(PD): You know she ah well she did not know what was coming um I can say that definitely but you know she got off the plane and was like I’ll just hop on a train and go wherever I need to go you know didn’t realize that’s traumatizing and you know Amanda was very lucky to have somebody who she who she knew would be there pick her up in a car and drive her and take her some place so everybody’s everybody’s first experiences the crucial crucial ones that are just about the break you they’re very different so there’s no way to like cover all the pieces.

(PA): And even just like, I’ve done two exchanges and they were totally different and you know the first ne like absolutely incredible loved every minute of it like that like cliché yeah it’ll be fun whatever you’re going to have the time of you’re life and it’s like life changing and I knew like Brazil wouldn’t be like that but it was still just like back when I was like so happy all the time and I never got homesick and I was the kid that always you know like called balling from summer camp mom I can’t take another day come pick me up and I never got homesick and my first like month in Brazil I was homesick but I’ve already done an exchange before and I was never homesick before and so it was just like one exchange can be like awesome and yeah you have like issues and problems but overall you’re happy and another one you’re depressed for three of your four month and like who knows how it’s gonna turn out and so it’s just you know even just from like it can it can really vary a lot. I mean if they’re similar.
(M): So what recommendations or advice would you give maybe for the people here at UGA in our office of global programs the College of Ag to better prepare their students to study abroad?

(PD): Try try to gather as many contacts as you can um…

(M): For you to meet once you get there?

(PD): Yeah like um we I felt like we were very fortunate because four of us girls were in close contact before going to UGA or going to Austria and that was that was extremely comforting because you know we were all in the same boat and we could you know like hold on to each other and like have somebody to be with um and also I was I was very lucky because I got paired up with a buddy from the University there and um she couldn’t come but I insisted that you know one of her friends come and pick me up at the airport um and I’m very very glad that I did and they were extremely welcoming and I met tons of her friends and it was awesome um so I would definitely recommend reach out to people that are going with you from UGA reach out to like any kinda contact possible that you could have with your home country or town or city or whatever because when you like you think that you’re all independent and you’ve got it down like when you have like you know two suitcases and a huge backpack alone in the airport it’s intimidating um and so being able to like lean on somebody as big or you know small it’s it’s important.

(PA): I’d say taking like contacts is huge and having someone you know you can rely on there um beyond that like a contact is someone like really I think my hardest thing you need to know like find housing before you get there start looking at housing before you get there have someone in the country that is like watching out for you like I never felt in Brazil there was anyone watching out for me I could’ve disappeared and hardly anyone
would’ve known and you know how do I look for a place to rent in this place that I’ve
never I don’t speak the language like calling people o the phone I don’t have a cell phone
what? Um it was so bad for me and that really can set the tone for your trip like having
someone come pick you up from the airport versus fumbling your way around um I
actually went to brazil the semester before like the fall semester or the spring semester
and had so much of a break down that I had to come back after a month and go back the
next month and I I had a friend of mine from UGA that went and she found housing with
these four great girls super quick it was nice it was cheap she was making friends I got
put in this really really crapy crapy apartment um with really weird people that were
smoking pot all the time and a creepy 40 year old man was living up stairs and no one
would talk to me I had to carry my poop outside because the plumbing did not work and I
was far from campus and no one cared and I just broke down in front of my professor
who was supposed to be coordinating me one day and he was like what is her problem
and I was like I’ve been telling you like I was there for a month they were on strike there
was like you can’t control the strike but you can control whether there is a professor or
someone of authority there to take care of me and find me somewhere to live or at least
have ideas of where to live before I come and I know one thing um like when the Latin
Americans Studies department received students from Costa Rica they never find they
could just reserve a place in the dorm for them and that would be so good for them but
they never do it because they always say they we don’t wanna pick somewhere for them
that they don’t like it so much better to have a place picked out for someone and then
they can then move out of than for them to arrive and everybody be to busy to help them
find somewhere to live so I think that was really traumatic for me and so like you know
you need to have someone helping you it’s such a good feeling to have somewhere to
unpack your suit case and I think that that’s something especially on an exchange where
it’s more independent you really need to have a better level of support.

(M): Whoa.
(PA): Hahaha

(PD): That’s I can’t even comprehend the anxiety you were going through seriously.

(M): I would’ve at the airport on my way back to the states said nah huh

(PA): So my study abroad was a fail that was also valuable even if I hadn’t wanted to go back.

(PD): So you went the semester before you actually went then?

(PA): Yeah.

(PD): Oh and why?

(PA): Well I went, I was planning on going that fall um and that was when the funding started um but then I went and no one communication with the university like you need to have a good contact at the university I was not informed that there was a strike at the university until I got there and past and saw the strike signs they’d been on strike for two months.

(M): So you didn’t have any classes the fall semester then?
(PA): No, that’s the thing my classes never started and they kept saying they’re gonna start next week they’re gonna start next week four weeks after it’s gonna start next week I was living in this crap hole um.

(M): No way.

(PA): I was on my way back.

(M): I would be too.

(PA): I was like I don’t care if I lose the funding and they were like it’s ok it’s ok you can go back next semester I went to a different city and it was a much better experience but like it also made me like before hand ok this is my contact like I know these classes are offered I know their not on strike.

(PB): I probably wouldn’t have not gone back, like that’s really brave to go back hahaha.

(PA): I wanted to go back to that city and the professor that was in charge here the coordinator for us was like PA I don’t have any contacts there that’s a really bad idea please just go to visososa it’s a great town there’s lots of students there Cliva will take care of you just please at least pick a different city I was like I’m going to.
(M): Mmmhmmmm. Does anybody have nothing they want to add as far as preparing students?

(PB): Um I think what was really helpful I didn’t get this but Alex did it she met with someone who went to Austria before she left and if they could find someone else who was a UGA student who studied abroad in the country they’re about to go to that would be really helpful so you could ask any questions that you have.

(PD): Or even just having that person in the back of their mind or like being able to email somebody and be like hey what’s up with the blah blah blah blah blah.

(M): Maybe even just set you up you know go to lunch or maybe just coffee and…

(Group): Yeah.

(M): Sit and talk cause I don’t know about ya’ll but sometimes like you don’t know the questions to ask because you don’t know what to ask until you’ve had that experience at least that’s the way I think so at least somebody to be like btw there’s squat pots there’s not a toilet there.

(PD): Or like the tampons was a big issue.
(PB): YES!!!

(PD): I let the girls know take a supply of tampons. I got in contact with her through the office of international education she’s like an international advisor or something here whatever um and she’s like oh and by the way like we’re on recording oh well

(M): It’s ok.

(PD): The the tampons don’t have applications like it is just straight up tampon so you might want to take your own tampons when you go and I was like thanks!!! I I emailed the thread that we had going on before going with the other girls like oh and guys like make sure that you bring your vitamins and your ibuprofens and your tampons.

(PA): Yeah. That’s a really big one for girls cause I had in Brazil that was part of the other thing to just like the icing on the cake like yeah that’s a big deal also like there are some places like in Latin America I couldn’t get tampons period.

(M): What could you get a pad?

(PA): Pads, pads so like really the office of international education for real like girls I don’t think that’s something inappropriate to bring up at this meeting of exchange students be like ladies you might wanna bring your own female products because they’re very different and much spacer in other parts of the world.
(M): I wouldn’t care I’d be like just tell me don’t let me get over there and be like what?

(PA): Yeah.

(PD): Another big thing that I would say is like take your vitamins over there because your diet is gonna be like crap for like the first month.

(PB): Seriously…

(PD): I lived off of like gummy bears and chocolate.

(PB): And I ate bread haha.

(PD): Right so like take your multivitamins so that you don’t collapse so that your hair doesn’t fall out so that your nails are ok then once you get you know once you’ve bought your pots and pans to cook everything like then you’re ok hahahaha.

(PB): Oh gosh I’m having these nightmare relapses hahahaha the terrible stuff I ate.

(M): So contacts and plenty of info as to what to bring you think are maybe the two things that they could do to prepare you guys better.
(PA): Yeah.

(M): Ok well that’s my last question is there anything else you guys wanna share any questions that you have for me before we end tonight? Ok.

(PA): People should study abroad.

(M): I agree.