

Studying Abroad in College: a Longitudinal Study Investigating how a Living-learning Community (llc) Impacts Students

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Abstract

Studying abroad offers an immersive educational experience that attracts a large number of undergraduates annually. The purpose of this longitudinal, mixed-method study was to identify which elements of a living-learning community based in one of Pacific University's (pseudonym) signature study abroad programs influenced students' intellectual, personal, social, and spiritual growth. These diverse programs offer summer, one semester, and academic year opportunities in locations ranging from Uganda to Italy. The unique setting, combined with a residential learning experience, offers both classroom and non-classroom spaces to develop multidimensionally. Although there are annual satisfaction surveys for Pacific University's International Programs, empirical studies that capture how these high-impact programs affect student development are scarce. To bridge this gap in current research, we adopted Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome Model to analyze data from undergraduates who participated in one of these 2021-2025 study abroad programs. After four years of data collection, 467 undergraduates completed a Google Forms survey composed of 32 questions that addressed: 1) Consent, 2) Demographics, 3) Input (Preconceptions of Countries), 4) Environment (Program Elements), 5) Learning Outcomes. Students consistently reported that personal travel, the educational field trip, and program staff were the three most influential elements in their environment that contributed positively to their development. In regard to the learning outcomes, 95-97% of participants reported intellectual, personal, and social growth, while 70% reported spiritual growth. This empirical study enables researchers and practitioners to recognize the transformative experiences that living-learning study abroad communities offer as they help reshape students' preconceptions and develop more globally-minded citizens.



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