



# Facilitating student access to global internships and study abroad: The value of high impact practices

Estrella C. Rodriguez<sup>1</sup>, Quynh D. Dang<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This case study documents student feedback on financial challenges and some of the benefits of a global internship at a large study center. The global internship experience was part of study abroad initiatives in Spain led by a large research university in the state of Florida over the summer months. The case study reviews students' input on financial opportunities offered by the institution. It also presents student views on the linguistic and cultural advantages of the global internship experience. Adapting from Tiv et al.'s (2022) Systemic Framework to an internship setting, we argue that the impact of the experience on student interns is moderated by interpersonal, ecological, social and temporal factors. Pedagogical implications are provided to inform study abroad academic leaders and to encourage student participation in future global internships abroad.

## Keywords

Credit recognition; financial opportunities; international internships; multicultural skills; study abroad

## 1. Introduction and background

After COVID-19 shut down borders and human travel was limited due to the health emergency, many higher education institutions had to re-launch their study abroad programs. One way to concentrate on these efforts was through the re-organization of study abroad centers. For example, rather than offering an extensive list of courses like it was the case before the pandemic, Florida research universities opted for listing two to three different offers in 2021 and 2022 to accommodate different disciplines and relaunch programs, with

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, United States of America

**Corresponding author:** Estrella C. Rodriguez ([estrella.rodriquez@ucf.edu](mailto:estrella.rodriquez@ucf.edu))

© Estrella C. Rodriguez, Quynh D. Dang

The work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/).

DOI: [10.36366/frontiers.v2iForumEATLT2.1093](https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v2iForumEATLT2.1093)

<https://frontiersjournal.org/index.php/Frontiers/TLT>

combinations like Zoology/Spanish or Internship/Integrated Business courses. This facilitated the task of securing accommodation for future sessions and ensured all health protocols were in place abroad while bringing a limited number of students to reopen the centers of study. At the same time relaunching also allowed for consideration of new programs at the institution.

Once the health emergency passed, unified centers abroad from the same institution continued the reorganization by offering new curriculum and expanding programs. The main advantage of these centers is that institutions can offer a variety of courses in multiple disciplines simultaneously. Students from different majors may receive credit in the process and enjoy an immersive experience abroad. They also get to interact with other students from the same institution who are taking other courses and benefit from intercultural activities together, (Netz, 2021). Study abroad centers can create study abroad communities where students of diverse majors from the same university grow as global citizens.

With the re-conceptualization of study abroad in the last two years, new global programs have emerged. In fact, study abroad now may take many forms, such as international service learning and global internship opportunities, shadowing at a given program of studies abroad for future admission, and other initiatives. In this project, we focus on a popular form of studying abroad nowadays: Signing on a global internship facilitated and recognized by the institution. By interning abroad, students advance in their academic program, as internship opportunities usually lead to credit recognition. Rivas Hermann et al. (2022) propose how students' home universities along with partner institutions abroad can create conditions that lead to study credits for the experience. This is an important incentive, as some students receive financial aid from state or federal sources and need to take at least six credits in summer semesters. They also gain valuable hands-on working experience for the future (Baert et al., 2021) and learn new concepts while applying classroom content in a practical environment (Rivas Hermann et al., 2022).

It is a developing area of study abroad that merits investigation. First, we are starting to learn the many benefits of global career skills after a short program interning abroad. Second, we can gain a lot of insight into the benefits by embracing a student perspective on what remains to be done after they take a short global internship experience. Third, we can reorganize global internship programs considering new existing resources and participant perspectives. Presently, there are not sufficient studies which focus on student insight and resources to respond to their feedback towards program improvement with global internships abroad. However, even with new study abroad developments and experiences after the pandemic years, many challenges remain with regards to financing students' international studies.

We know that going abroad to intern represents a financial investment that many students cannot make. American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) estimates that only 1 to 2% of the student body of any given institution in the nation can undertake studies abroad. Such is also the case at our university as well. There are other contributing factors like student interest and program organization and duration, and of course, there is pressure to graduate. Yet, despite the importance of studying abroad in the development of global citizenship, only a few interested students in the US are able to travel to study or intern overseas (Aw & Torres, 2024).

Our project documents student feedback on the challenges and the benefits of a short global internship program. We also provide implications to encourage future student participation in international internships. We document some experiences at a major study center in Spain led by a large research university in the state of Florida and review student input on the financial opportunities offered to sign up for the program. We also discuss linguistic and cultural advantages of the global internship via student input. The center was operating in a major city of Spain during four weeks in the summer months and gave students the possibility to take nine different courses: computer science, health sciences, hospitality and tourism, international business, internship, kinesiology, psychology, and Spanish as a second language.

In addition, our study informs global scholars and educators about the importance of listening to student input as part of refining credited global programs. It is paramount to continue opening doors for more and more students to study and intern abroad. Only a few studies (Davis & Knight, 2021; Luxton et al., 2022; Rider & Miller-Perrin, 2023) have examined student perception of the different components of study abroad programs, including global internships. These authors documented student views through either interviews, questionnaires or surveys. Some of the areas explored in the case studies include financial opportunities, the value of immersive experiences and how internships foster a sense of well-being and personal growth.

With this project, we offer student feedback on an international internship experience and reflect on its many advantages, and what remains to be done for future similar programs. We document via anonymized surveys some of the financial options the university provided to students, student efforts to fund the experience, and its holistic value. As an example of a high impact educational practice (HIP). Luxton and colleagues (2022) discussed how important HIP course components like hands-on activities and cross-cultural learning in project-based curricular assignments can lead to significant student learning in the long term. A global internship program should be an opportunity to grow and become global citizens for students who are ready to engage in international experiences.

## 2. Internship abroad as a high impact practice

The advantages of interning abroad are well known (Aw & Torres, 2024; Luxton et al., 2022; Rider & Miller-Perrin, 2023). The first advantage is an opportunity to complete degree requirements, as students may receive credit to advance in their programs of study. Secondly, it leads to positive career prospects, as 75% to 81% of employers are likely to consider hiring graduates who have completed internships or worked in multicultural environments (Finley, 2025). Still another advantage is the acquisition of multi-cultural skills. This is connected to influences of the host culture abroad and how they align with or expand student family heritage or beliefs. It may also relate to opportunities provided by the host university or partner abroad in organizing cultural activities; like cooking classes or landmark visits, just to mention two. There is also the possibility to network with peers and other individuals on site. By the same token, there is the possibility to develop additional linguistic skills while communicating with different individuals in the target language and culture, should they be located in a country that speaks a language different than their own. Students may also develop significant relationships with domestic peers who are also studying abroad at the same center (Rider & Miller-Perrin, 2023).

A global internship is an example of High Impact Practices (HIPs). As HIPs that are embedded in course learning outcomes, students develop intercultural competencies and global citizenship (Luxton et al., 2022) through their participation in internships abroad. They also benefit from a dynamic curriculum in the different disciplines, where reflection and opportunities to learn from multiple sources (peers, guest speakers, other faculty leaders on site, the local host community) are abundant. Structured program design with critical thinking assignments facilitate metacognition as part of HIP experiences (Kuh, 2008).

In our institution, students also engage with other HIP courses on campus. There are four HIP course designations with the option offered to students to present projects at the HIP Student Showcase at the end of the regular fall and spring semesters. The HIP designations hosted on campus are Global Learning, Integrative-Learning Experience, Research-Intensive, and Service-Learning. These courses carry attributes which students can preview in the course catalog of the university at regular times of registration. As mentioned above, HIP courses contain well-structured assignments with plenty of opportunities to reflect on content matter and apply it in different contexts. After taking HIP courses on campus as a first step, students are encouraged to sign up for a study abroad opportunity or a global internship during the summer months or as part of an exchange semester.

To offer a study abroad program of quality, some institutions seek collaboration with multiple agencies familiar with study abroad sites to arrange a few of the organizational logistics (Luxton et al., 2022; Rider & Miller-Perrin, 2023). Such collaborations can enhance program quality and add interesting cultural activities which are pre-arranged prior to student arrival in the home country. In our case, the university partnered with a well-known international provider organization to customize the study abroad program in Spain. The partnering organization offered reliable and safe accommodation for all students and faculty participating in the study abroad center. There was also on-site transportation provided, as well as cultural and academic activities organized during the week to keep students engaged with the local culture and help them develop intercultural competencies. Multiple case managers were available on site to support students in the event of emergency situations. Students paid no more than \$5,000 for the internship or study abroad experience, which lasted four weeks and included comprehensive health insurance. They had to cover their own tuition and airfare costs. If students were recipients of state and federal tuition grants, they were able to apply those awards towards study abroad tuition and general program costs.

Students who signed up enrolled in different course offerings (computer, health sciences hospitality, business, kinesiology, psychology and Spanish) and attended classes four times a week. The students engaging in the global internship program worked during the day and attended class once a week in the evening. Students could only register for one class, though the institution now offers the possibility to enroll in two courses throughout the full summer. Classes were held at one of the local universities in the Spanish city through prior arrangements with the international partnering provider organization.

Students who enrolled in the HIP internship experience course worked in teams of 4-5 students in different companies of the host city. It was a project-based internship. Students worked on their internship projects and portfolios based on their major or specialization. Majors also determined site placement. On the first day of the internship they met with their supervisor who assigned tasks based on the group's academic strengths. We had previously divided groups prior to departure and also participated in the initial meeting with the industries.

Once we knew about the main goals of the organizations on how to expand based on intern feedback, we suggested different ways for each student to tackle their internship project based on major of study and students had to prepare a final assignment containing recommendations for the local company to grow and expand. They also reflected on the experience at large as part of a final assignment which was an important HIP course component. The reflections were unstructured and assigned just at the end of the internship. It

allowed student interns to connect past experiences in the classroom or previous internships with their ongoing career and academic goals. Students were also given complete freedom to use visual aids (graphs, cartoons, and other forms) to visually represent change and growth. The importance of the unstructured reflections cannot be stressed enough: They were an important course assignment summarizing some of the lessons learned in the course. The internship course also facilitated cultural learning which impacted student growth and their major of studies as students had to interact with many elements of the host culture (Luxton et al., 2021).

A group of students worked in a styling furniture store, where they focused on marketing and finance strategies to expand the business operation and reach out to potential new clients. Another group of students interned at a biomedical clinic and offered tips on product expansion, as well as possible partnerships with nearby hotel spas. A third group worked in a well-known gym facility and provided ways to enhance sustainability practices and collaboration with nearby hotels. A final group gained experience at a language school reviewing course offerings and suggesting ways to diversify clientele and increase profits during several times of year.

Some of the areas selected by the students for the internship final projects included themes such as sustainability, pricing, public relations, advertising. Students also used frameworks typical of business models like SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal) analyses. These strategic frameworks facilitated the task of presenting challenges and ways to expand to all industries concerned. Employers were able to use the models as visualization aids while students conducted group presentations at the end of the internship in the classroom. Moreover, our interns explored additional resources city-wide the internship organization could use to launch new operations or partnerships. The class presented their projects to the companies in English on the last day of class (students did not have to speak Spanish as a requirement to take courses or intern in Spain at the study center).

All students at the study center and regardless of course selection were able to connect together at the cultural activities organized by the partnering agency at least twice a week. Students also exchanged experiences and anecdotes at the beginning and end-of-year receptions. There were a few pre-departure meetings starting in early September of the year prior to the study abroad experience. By March of the travel year, students had already signed up and committed to the summer study abroad program, of which the global internship course was one course offer with their first deposit made to the study abroad unit of the university. Individual course orientations were scheduled for April and early May. Departure for the study abroad center in Spain was in late

May, and student attended a health and safety workshop immediately upon landing in the study abroad site.

As the course instructors, we were responsible for teaching the internship course and facilitated working hours for the registered students. Student interns receive one to three (1-3) credit hours towards their program of studies. Though leading the internships was our primary faculty function, we offered all participating students at the study center the possibility to enroll in the study by providing feedback via anonymized Qualtrics surveys at the end of the program (See Appendix 1). Survey responses were collected on a voluntary basis during the last week of class. Students were sent the Qualtrics link by the faculty members teaching the respective disciplines in the program. Students from four of the classes responded to the surveys (hospitality, health sciences, internship, Spanish classes).

### 3. The Case Study

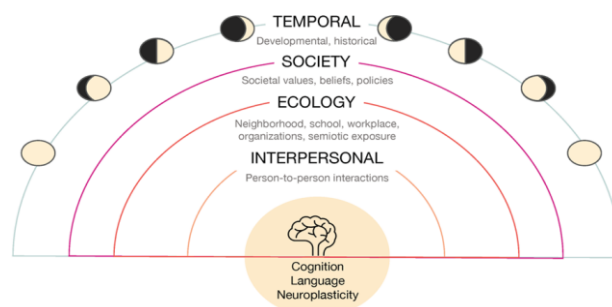
When analyzing student responses, we considered a heterogeneous approach (Netz, 2021). There are many relevant factors which may influence a positive or a negative global internship program experience. These include the individual learner (personality, language proficiency, prior experiences abroad, family heritage, graduation year, and available finances), the context of the experience abroad (planned curriculum, site abroad, social norms on site, immersion possibilities for students, and others). No less important are the intended effects of the experience itself (length of program, student programmed activities, organization on site, purpose to go abroad). In the case of internships, the type of industry site abroad and the relevant connection to academic major concentration also affect outcomes (Luxton et al., 2022; Rider & Miller-Perrin, 2023). It is important to always align student academic competencies and interests with internship responsibilities and to provide systematic support for the duration of the global internship. All factors are dynamic and may overlap with one another, especially when interning abroad.

When evaluating student feedback on linguistic opportunities abroad - via surveys, we also deemed heterogeneity as important. The Systems Framework of Bilingualism originally proposed by Tiv et al. (2022) and Titone & Tiv (2022) for psycholinguistics was important to consider and adapt to a global internship program given the influence of many factors. In our case, student interns get many benefits. It is not only the technical expertise they bring to industries based on their academic knowledge. Benefits also relate to how they absorb elements of the new society and how those elements align with their personal beliefs. It is all related to the career and job market field and engaging with teamwork at a site industry.

In the original Systems Framework proposed by Tiv et al. (2022), language and bilingualism are seen as a dynamic system influenced by interpersonal, ecological, social and temporal factors. This dynamic framework allowed us to interpret student feedback critically from different angles, and to evaluate the advantages of the global internship from multiple perspectives. Global internships can also be regarded as a complex dynamic system, which continues to influence the intern -even after re-entry.

**FIGURE (1)**

A SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK OF BILINGUALISM (TIV ET AL., 2022)



By viewing the global internship experience holistically, we recognize multiple areas that can have an impact on student career development and multiculturalism. We also attempted to gather student feedback on the financial opportunities offered by the institution and what remained to be done for future cohorts traveling to the international study center in future years. All students who had registered and committed to the study center by February prior to the departure date were given the possibility to apply for Study Abroad scholarships. The Study Abroad unit scholarships financed twenty percent (20%) of the total cost of the program. In addition, the unit of Experiential Learning on campus, which hosted the international internship experience course, offered competitive awards of \$2,000.00 to those students who had applied to intern abroad. The awards offered by Experiential Learning represented forty percent (40%) of the total costs of travel. Some students applied to both the Study Abroad and Experiential Learning sources of funding. About four or five students also applied for and received important federal grants, like the Gilman Scholarship. All students were advised to start applying early to secure financial aid for their study abroad program through a diversity of sources. As part of the case study, we investigated the following questions:

- How do students value financial opportunities provided by the institution to study abroad, and what remains to be done to increase funding and opportunities for future internship cohorts?

- What are some benefits of studying and interning abroad in terms of academic, personal, linguistic, career gains and others, as reported by students?

In the academic year 2022-2023, a total of 200 students attended the international study center in Spain during the first part of the summer of 2023 (May-June) and for a period of four weeks. It represented 38% of the total number of students interning or studying abroad. In the summer of 2024, there were 154 students at the center during the same period. They represented 21% of the total number of students who went abroad in 2023-2024. A total of fifty-three (53) of the students at the study abroad center completed the anonymized surveys. Eighteen participants (18) were from the summer of 2023 and 35 participants from 2024. Thirty eight percent (38%) or 20 participants were bilinguals, who spoke English along with a separate language spoken at home or in society with high proficiency. There was diversity in the languages represented in the student surveys (American Sign Language, Bosnian, French, Portuguese, Rumanian, Spanish, Urdu).

Most of the research on bilingualism and bilingual literacy has focused on Spanish-English speakers (e.g., Llombart-Huesca & Gaytán-Soto, 2023; Pascual y Cabo & Torres, 2021; Polinsky, 2022). Less attention has been devoted to other languages (Bayram et al., 2019; Diskin, 2020) though this part of the literature is now growing. Only a few studies have examined the effects of studying or interning abroad on bilinguals of different languages and from a perspective of new career and linguistic opportunities (Quan et al., 2023; Rivas Hermann et al., 2022).

The surveys included multiple question formats (Likert scale questions, multiple choice, open-ended questions, yes-no questions) and participants were encouraged to provide feedback in the open-ended ones. The survey instrument is presented in Appendix 1. Some of the students were also multilingual speakers who spoke more than two languages. Some participants were of Eastern European descent and at least five participants were French Creole second-generation learners. Some students were of Middle Eastern family ancestry. The sample also included second generation Spanish speakers with at least one parent coming from multiple areas of the Spanish-speaking world. All participants spoke English with native proficiency and were attending the same institution at the time of data collection.

## 4. Results

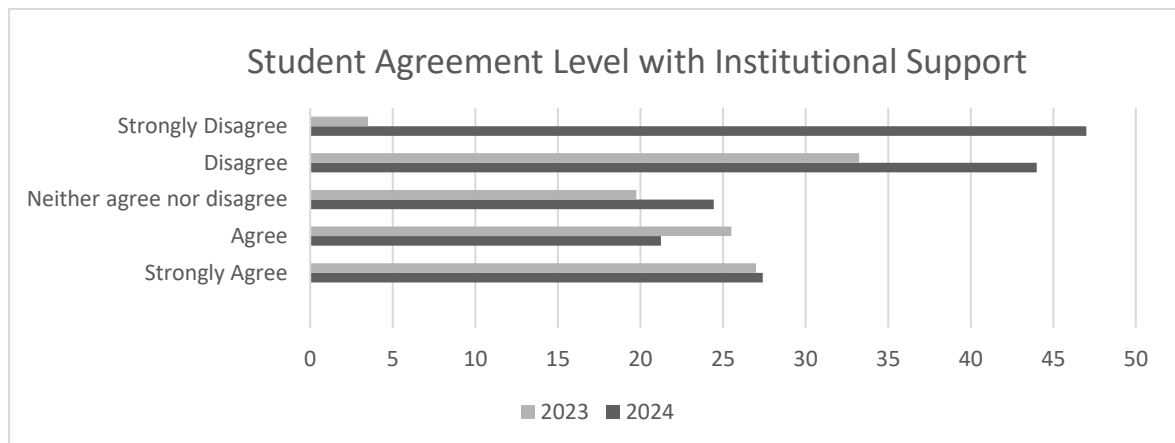
Results from Likert Scale survey questions are discussed first. They allowed us to quantify the degree with which students agreed or disagreed with the amount of financial aid provided by the institution to study or intern abroad.

Student responses to Questions 6 and 7 (see Appendix 1) are presented in Figures (2) and (3). We have compared and contrasted answers from the 2023 and 2024 cohorts. Most students disagreed that the university had provided enough funds for the opportunity abroad (Figures 2 and 3). Participants agreed that they themselves had funded the experience with resources outside the educational institution, mostly with family support or personal savings. In qualitative data collected, students mentioned they had had to supply the funds themselves to be able to go abroad, as awards were disbursed later: “I did not get my scholarship funds until after the program and I returned to the US”. From another participant we noted that, “The scholarship came after I completed the final payment”.

Question 6 - Indicate the degree with which you agree or disagree with this statement: "I was able to fund my study abroad experience with the university’s financial resources -including out of state or study abroad scholarships- and I was assisted during this process".

**FIGURE (2)**

STUDENT AGREEMENT LEVEL WITH INSTITUTIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT

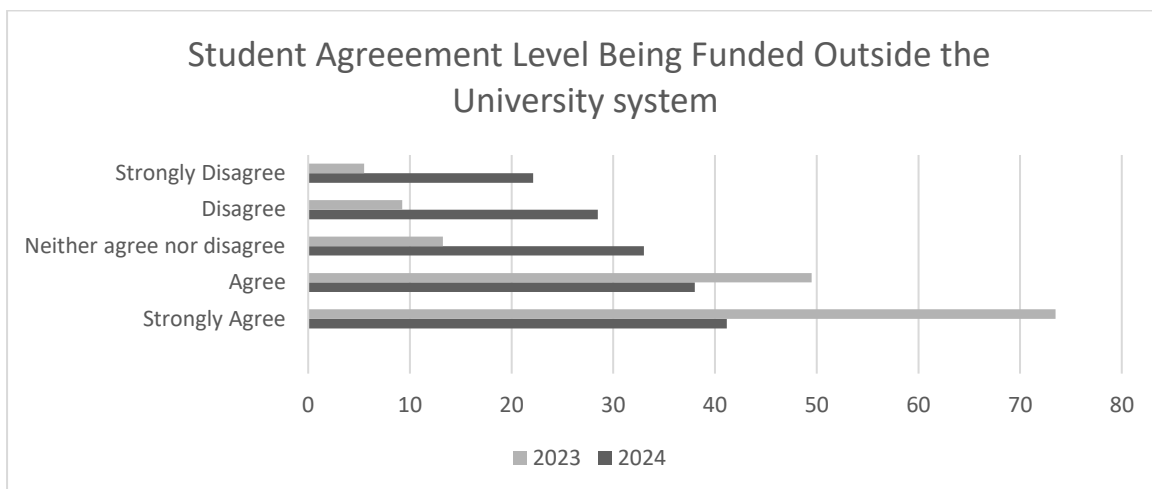


Question 7 attempted to capture possible resources to fund studies or the internship abroad from outside the institution. Similar findings were observed for both the 2023 and 2024 groups.

Question 7 - Indicate the degree with which you agree or disagree with this statement: "I was able to fund this study abroad opportunity with financial resources outside the university environment".

**FIGURE (3)**

STUDENT AGREEMENT LEVEL BEING FUNDED OUTSIDE THE INSTITUTION



As mentioned before, most students funded the study abroad experience with resources outside the university system. Resources included personal savings, family support or other funding. Seven participants (7) out of the fifty-three (53) who participated mentioned they had received a combination of institutional awards and family funds. Two (2) students mentioned they received federal grants to go abroad and there were four (4) other students who mentioned they had been awarded Experiential Learning scholarships. Six (6) participants reported having received the Study Abroad scholarships through the Study Abroad office. To assess linguistic benefits of the global internship experience, we also asked participants to comment on situations which had facilitated speaking Spanish or multiple other languages at the study center. Students were invited to comment on any perceived growth in their heritage culture, on the value of the immersion experience itself, and on further opportunities for personal or career growth (survey questions 10, 11, 12). We present some of the comments next. Original verbatim provided by the students remains unmodified.

**TABLE (1)**

VALUE OF THE GLOBAL INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AS REPORTED BY DIFFERENT PARTICIPANTS (IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE, CULTURE AND HERITAGE VALUE, PERSONAL GROWTH)

Immersion Value	Cultural and Heritage Value	Personal Value and Growth
"Immersive language aided in learning in depth."	"I am Panamanian, so it was really interesting to see where some of the origins of my culture were."	"I have not grown in my own culture, but I have expanded and improved as a person".
"When ordering, when being respectful of trying to speak the local language."	"I am Hispanic and so being here and learning the language has definitely helped me in feeling more connected to my heritage".	"Navigating cultural differences and language barriers required a lot of patience and an open mind, which are qualities that are crucial in any global business context".

<p>"My Spanish class helped me practice speaking Spanish, but I learned Spanish the most when I went out on my own outside the city, and away from tourist areas".</p>	<p>"I did enjoy this a lot. My family is Minorcan. So, it was nice to see some of the Minorcan influence and understand the things that Spanish had influenced us".</p>	<p>"I would recommend that other students know their goals, dreams, and what they want to do (when going abroad)".</p>
<p>"Transactions at shops and restaurants, asking locals questions".</p>	<p>"Going everywhere people spoke to me in Spanish, but I'm a native speaker".</p>	<p>"It has given me a whole new perspective and appreciation for different cultures and lifestyles, and I definitely would love to live there one day."</p>
<p>"I was able to learn more Spanish by immersing myself in the culture".</p>	<p>"It reinforced the idea that language learning extends beyond textbooks and is deeply rooted in cultural context and daily life."</p>	<p>"Living in a foreign city, away from the familiar comforts of home, required me to be more independent and resourceful. I had to manage my time and finances effectively, navigate a new city, and build a support network from scratch. These experiences taught me resilience and adaptability, qualities that are essential in both professional and personal life."</p>

In keeping with a heterogeneous vision (Netz, 2021; Titone & Tiv, 2022; Tiv et al., 2022;) to evaluate the effects of the global internship experience from different perspectives, we organized Table (1) around the immersion value of the experience, its relevance to participant culture and family heritage, as well as any evidence of personal growth after the global internship experience. Through the responses, it was revealed that only four (4) of the surveyed students reported having taken HIP courses on campus during prior semesters. It suggests that for most of the student participants, studying or interning abroad was a first step towards HIP courses in spite of the many possibilities they had on campus to enroll in HIP experiences. Some students had already interned locally through domestic internships, so it was not their first time working with a company to expand experiences related to their academic major.

When reviewing the impact of financial opportunities provided by the academic institution to study abroad, we noted how university funds were insufficient, and most students had to provide the funds themselves. Some students also mentioned that they received institutional awards, but these were not disbursed until after the return from Spain, which resulted in them having to find the resources a month before undertaking abroad studies. This was

reported by both cohorts, in 2023 and 2024. On a positive note, and as expected, students reported multiple benefits of studying and interning abroad in terms of personal and linguistic gains. The students who left were changed upon returning. They navigated daily life in a new city with new social norms. What about career growth as reported by internship students?

Interning with different industries on site (the biomedical center, the furniture store, the fitness facility -gym-, and the language school), also brought many benefits for participants’ future careers. Students benefited from a flexible work arrangement, as they worked remotely on some days of the week and were able to join the other groups taking other subjects on cultural outings. In general, the internship course at the study center expanded practical skills in students (Nunley et al., 2015). Some comments students provided in the surveys indicate that they appreciated the value of teamwork, hospitality care, and the need to prioritize career and personal plans, among others. Students were also able to apply academic classroom instruction to real-life contexts. Some comments also connect with students appreciating another perspective from the career world they had not originally envisioned. They mentioned the value of applying these new lessons in future internships, or the need of changing career paths in some instances as the answer to continued professional development (Table 2).

Similarly, students from the 2023 and 2024 summer abroad sessions at the study center in Spain reported personal savings, family support and a combination of funds as the primary sources of aid to fund their studies and internships. There were two Gilman scholars in the 2013 study participating group, but none from the participant sample of 2024 who responded to the surveys. Students from the 2024 group strongly disagreed that university resources had funded their studies. They also strongly disagreed they had been assisted in the process. Participants agreed they were the ones who found resources outside the university system to be able to go abroad.

**TABLE (2)**

NEW LESSONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AS SEEN BY SIX PARTICIPANTS

<p>Participant 1: “It was enjoyable to witness accompany that wasn’t so focused on becoming bigger and better, but genuinely providing good service for their patients.”</p>	<p>Participant 3: “It was eye-opening to learn how much of an impact the target market’s society has on the way marketers need to advertise. Applying this research to the culture of Spain was another valuable experience that broadened my scope due to my newfound ability to assess a foreign market”.</p>	<p>Participant 5: “In addition to teamwork, for me it was great for me to finally be able to use all the Finance experience that I have learned in the classroom and being able to incorporate it into a real-life business and also being able to prove to myself what I learned in the classroom actually stuck and that I know what I am doing.”</p>
--	---	---

---

Participant 2: "This internship experience helped me learn about working with difficult people, training me on how to deal with these issues, such as difficult coworkers. I guess you can say that this internship helped me learn how to work with a team."

Participant 4: "Rather than pursuing law school immediately after graduation, I am now considering furthering my education with a master's degree that integrates business strategy, entrepreneurship, and consulting. This shift aligns with my career aspirations to leverage my analytical skills and business acumen in helping organizations navigate challenges and achieve sustainable growth."

Participant 6: "The emphasis on work-life balance was a refreshing change. Unlike the intense, fast-paced work environments in the U.S., the office in Spain had a more relaxed atmosphere. Lunch breaks were longer, and there was a clear distinction between work hours and personal time. This taught me the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance and how it can boost productivity and job satisfaction."

---

## 5. Discussion and implications

The fact that both global internship cohorts, from 2023 and 2024, reported similar sentiments points to the need to find additional financial incentives for students to be able to intern at major university centers abroad. A variety of scholarships may come from different academic units on campus. In this project, students were able to apply and secure scholarships from both the Study Abroad and Experiential Learning units of the institution. Some participants who applied early at the start of the academic year were able to receive both awards and got funding for 60% of travel total expenses. Most students in those two summers did not receive any kind of financial aid or received limited funds from the institution. That situation changed in the summer of 2025 when a new study center opened in San José, Costa Rica and the global internship course was offered on site. Last year, Costa Rica student interns received \$3,000 each in scholarship funds from the university global office to intern in San José. Consequently, the course was at full capacity in just two weeks.

We reiterate that it is important to advise students from week one of the fall semester or early in the academic year to seek alternative ways of funding to cover tuition and program fees to undertake the global internship opportunity. They can start locating funding internally with the institution first, but also at the state and federal level. As educators and course instructors, we have also done our part to modify the budget. We are now able to reach out to companies and industries on the abroad site directly, rather than relying entirely on the partner agency abroad. We have secured agreements with non-profit sites abroad in the study centers to help students fund the global opportunity without a middle source. Guaranteeing internship sites ourselves in this way for the students saves each intern a minimum of \$500.00. This

reduces the total program fees from \$5,000 to \$4,500. In addition, students who get state and federal tuition scholarships are able to apply those to the global internship course tuition provided they take an additional class over the summer.

Next, we will set out to review a few of the benefits of interning abroad in terms of academic, personal, linguistic, career gains. We saw the advantages and benefits of a global internship from a *Systems* prism (Tiv et al., 2022). In this sense we translated Tiv and colleagues' linguistic perspective on bilingualism to a different holistic global internship context. Students work with a company abroad and benefit from many angles. Language and culture also play a part in how students assimilate some of the challenges of working abroad.

Forty-two percent (42%) of student participants mentioned they were able to speak Spanish and other languages with peers and local individuals while abroad. This finding corroborates the value of linguistic immersion on student bilingualism and the possibilities it gives students to aim for global competence (Segalowitz et al., 2004; Luxton et al., 2021). Students also commented on the positive aspects connected with a different lifestyle abroad and lessons they learned, which shows the benefits at a personal and interpersonal level. Participants mentioned the beneficial aspect of applying classroom content in the real world. We witnessed many academic advantages for students. Most of them were not seniors and continued their program and courses at the university upon re-entry.

Blending what is learned in the classroom with real-life experiences is an important goal of HIP courses (Kuh, 2008). It gives students a competitive start for their post-graduate life (Aw & Torres, 2024; Baert et al., 2021; Davis & Knight, 2021; Nunley, 2015; Rivas Hermann et al., 2022). All students were also able to secure another internship in the months following re-entry. Some of the students finished their programs and requested recommendation letters from us and were successfully hired by local and state industries.

More connected with the internship opportunity, internship students referred to the usefulness of learning from teamwork and its daily challenges. They valued effective communication and transparency while working in groups, suggesting ways for the companies to expand. There is no doubt that as part of the systemic nature of benefits, there were very positive inter-personal experiences for the student interns. At the same time, they appreciated the opportunity to make individual contributions connected with their majors of study. These comments suggest positive changes in the belief system of interns and the possibility that there may be additional employment opportunities for them in the not-so-distant future (Nunley et al., 2016).

Returning to the linguistic immersion and how it influenced our students, some students with Spanish heritage bilingualism in the family also reported they were able to connect or re-connect with the parental language and culture. Although many heritage Spanish students hesitated to communicate in Spanish at the start of the study abroad experience, they felt more comfortable negotiating communicative input in this language at the end of the program. Studying and interning abroad involves multiple opportunities to grow academically, culturally and personally.

As an HIP experience, the conception of the curriculum and the logistics of the program are also important factors to offer students who are studying and interning abroad the possibility to reflect on daily lessons gained abroad. In the same way, there should be opportunities to know and interact with the local culture in study abroad as part of course planning. When the individual learner is given multiple venues to benefit from participating in programs abroad, they are in a better position to play as active participants of the experience abroad. The context of the new city, and the industries are important as well, as they may facilitate a positive experience abroad.

By adopting a systemic approach and considering many factors in a global internship project like ours, we have emphasized how student interns are able to navigate different challenges. These challenges do not relate only to past personal experiences. They also relate to new social norms and ways to do things at work in a location abroad. They also connect with team spirit and making things work regardless of individual differences. There are also practical challenges caused by financial obligations of the program and the pressure to graduate, as well as the capacity to blend classroom knowledge with career skills. There is no question that funding is paramount for students to be able to find good global internship opportunities.

Students must also be advised early in the academic year to be able to plan which awards they will be applying for financial aid once they decide to undertake the study abroad experience. In this sense and as part of financial education and counsel, students must be made aware that disbursement of funds may not be immediate. Schools usually retain award portions towards outstanding funds remaining in student accounts, so students may not see award amounts disbursed in their accounts immediately.

In terms of documenting additional student experiences, it is also important to involve more students in survey collection. A limitation of our project is that only approximately fifteen percent (15%) of the group who went abroad responded to the surveys. More students should be encouraged to participate with the realization that they are contributing to program improvement and student involvement to study abroad. We also recognize that

the survey instrument questionnaire to collect student input was limited in depth. After 2024 we have added questions which give students opportunities to comment on changes made to the program and how those affect their participation in the global internship. Many students point out, for example, that the \$3,000 financial aid package offered by the university in 2025 made it possible for them to travel to Costa Rica, where the cost of living has risen dramatically since 2020. We will continue refining the instrument as the global internship initiative continues to get offered in future semesters.

## 6. Conclusion

As the global internship program was only four weeks long, we did not re-evaluate if students were able to continue studying the language of the host country (Spanish). They mentioned how the experience had transformed them enough to want to repeat the experience, but our project does not document additional steps students took to continue their growth as global citizens after this experience. Our project shows light on how becoming global and getting benefits from studying, interning abroad is a dynamic system (Tiv et al., 2022) involving contextual, social, personal factors. Students may engage and even adopt new strategies facilitated by a study/work-abroad context.

There is also no question that there are many factors that change students going abroad, and they may influence students differently (Netz, 2021). Each factor may contribute in different ways to encourage use of the immersion language, or the adoption of new social norms while leading the participant to an appreciation of the new experience. Student surveys show the importance of increasing financial access for all students to study abroad. This should be facilitated by the institution via scholarships or financial packages. The importance of early advising to undertake the experience cannot be underestimated. At a time when studying and interning abroad is a reality after the COVID pandemic and study abroad centers are in demand, this is paramount.

## Ethical Approval

This study was exempted from Institutional Review Board approval.

## Acknowledgments

We thank all students who participated in the surveys and answered the questions. We also thank those faculty members teaching at the study center in Spain who previewed the surveys themselves and encouraged their students to

participate. This study was exempted from Institutional Review Board approval and did not receive funding from any agency.

## References

- Aw, F., & Torres, M. A. (2024, February 26). US college students need to go away: Why study abroad is essential to our future. *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/opinion/4490110-us-college-students-need-to-go-away-why-study-abroad-is-essential-to-our-future/>
- Baert, S., Neyt, B., Siedler, T., Tobback, I., & Verhaest, D. (2021). Student internships and employment opportunities after graduation: A field experiment. *Economics of Education Review*, 83, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2021.102141>
- Davis, K. A., & Knight, D. B. (2021). Comparing students' study abroad experiences and outcomes across global contexts. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 83, 114-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.05.003>
- Diskin, C. (2020). New speakers in the Irish context: Heritage language maintenance among multilingual migrants in Dublin, Ireland. *Frontiers in Education*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2019.00163>
- Finley, A.P. (2025). *The agility imperative: How employer view preparation for an uncertain future*. American Association of Colleges and Universities. <https://www.aacu.org/research/the-agility-imperative>
- Kuh, G. (2008). *High-Impact educational practices: what they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. American Association of Colleges and Universities. <https://www.aacu.org/publication/high-impact-educational-practices-what-they-are-who-has-access-to-them-and-why-they-matter>
- Llombart-Huesca, A., & Gaytán-Soto, L.D. (2023). Spanish heritage languages learners' reading accuracy and spelling difficulties. *Spanish as a Heritage Language*, 3(2): Selected papers from the 9<sup>th</sup> National Symposium on Spanish as a Heritage Language, 65-87. <https://doi.org/10.5744/shl.2023.1947>
- Luxton, I., Valdes-Vazquez, R., Egemen, O., & Thornes, L. (2022). High Impact Learning in a short-term study abroad program. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 34(1), 97-130a. DOI: 10.36366/frontiers.v34i1.541
- Netz, N. (2021). Who benefits most from studying abroad? A conceptual and empirical overview. *Higher Education*, 82, 1049-1069. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00760-1>
- Nunley, J.M., Pugh, A., Romero, N., & Seals, R. A. (2015). College major, internship experience and employment opportunities: Estimates from a résumé audit. *Labour Economics*, 38, 37-46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2015.11.002>
- Pascual y Cabo, D., & Torres, J. (2021). Aproximaciones al estudio del español como lengua de herencia. Routledge. First Edition Book series: *Advances in Spanish Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429443657>
- Polinsky, M. (2022). Some remarks on Spanish in the bilingual world. *Journal of World Languages*, 9(1), 15-26. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2022-0053>
- Quan, T., Diao, W., & Trentman, E. (2023). Returning to normal?: Reimagining study abroad and language learning for a sustainable and equitable future. *L2 Journal*, 15(2), 145-159. <https://doi.org/10.5070/L215260152>
- Rider, R., & Miller-Perrin, C. (2023). Sense of community as a mediator between study abroad experiences and perceived well-being. *Modern Psychological Studies*, 29(1), 1-25. <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol29/iss1/28>
- Rivas Hermann, R., Amaral, M., & Bonzanini Bossle, M. (2022). Integrating problem-based learning with international internships in business education. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 32(3-4), 202-235, DOI: 10.1080/08975930.2022.2033667
- Segalowitz, N., Freed, B., Collentine, J., Lafford, B., Lazar, N., & Díaz-Campos, M. (2004). A comparison of Spanish second language acquisition in two different learning contexts: Study abroad and the domestic classroom. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 10(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v10i1.130>

- Titone, D. A., & Tiv, M. (2022). Rethinking multilingual experience through a Systems Framework of Bilingualism. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 26(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728921001127>
- Tiv, M., Kutlu, E., Gullifer, J. W., Feng, R. Y., Doucerain, M. M., & Titone, D. A. (2022). Bridging interpersonal and ecological dynamics of cognition through a systems framework of bilingualism. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 151(9), 2128-2143. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001174>

## Author Biography

**Estrella C. Rodriguez** is a faculty member at the Dixon Career Development Center of the University of Central Florida. She teaches internship courses in the Experiential Learning unit, and collaborates with UCF Abroad in opening opportunities to study abroad for all students. She is also a student advocate in facilitating access to global internships for all students of different academic profiles.

**Dr. Quynh D. Dang** is the University of Central Florida (UCF) Director of Experiential Learning, which includes Service Learning, Global Learning, Integrated Learning Experience, and Knight Shadow. She works to ensure all UCF students have access to quality internships and applied learning experiences.

## Appendix 1

### Barcelona Study Center Surveys

#### Introduction

You can help us gather information about opportunities available to all students to undertake study abroad experiences, including at the Barcelona Study Center. Your answers will provide feedback on how the university can better facilitate student participation while studying abroad and to continue expanding global courses and programs on campus. You can also inform us if your linguistic practices have changed or expanded while studying or interning abroad to continue improving and refining study abroad curricula.

The survey is anonymous. Your confidentiality is protected.

**Q1- Do you consider yourself a bilingual student? If yes, which languages do you read/write/speak?**

**Q2- Please select the course or courses you are taking at the Barcelona Study Center during this semester, Summer A 2024.**

BUSINESS GEB 3375: Introduction to International Business

COMPUTER SCIENCE COP 2500: Concepts in Computer Science

HEALTH SCIENCES HSC 2524: Introduction to Human Disease

HEALTH SCIENCES HUN 2201: Fundamentals of Human Nutrition

HOSPITALITY FSS 3008: Culture and Cuisine

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE IDS 3947, 4947 & 5947

KINESIOLOGY PEM 2104: Personal Fitness and Wellness

PSYCHOLOGY PSY 2025: Psychology of Art

SPANISH LANGUAGE SPN 1121: Elementary Spanish Language and Civilization II

**Q3 -Have you participated in a previous study abroad program before? If yes, when did you go?**

**Q4 - Are you taking another course this summer beside the study abroad one? If yes, which course will you take? A webcourse? In-person on the main campus campus?**

**Q5- How were you able to fund this study abroad experience at the Barcelona Study Center? Select all that apply.**

STUDY ABROAD SCHOLARSHIP

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

STATEWIDE STUDY ABROAD SCHOLARSHIP

FEDERAL PROGRAM

PERSONAL SAVINGS

FAMILY SUPPORT

A COMBINATION OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

OTHER FUNDING

**Q6 - Indicate the degree with which you agree or disagree with this statement: "I was able to fund my study abroad experience with school financial resources -including out of state or study abroad scholarships- and I was assisted during this process".**

STRONGLY AGREE – AGREE – NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE – DISAGREE – STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Q7 - Indicate the degree with which you agree or disagree with this statement: "It was able to fund this study abroad opportunity with financial resources outside the school environment".**

STRONGLY AGREE – AGREE – NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE –  
DISAGREE – STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Q8 - If you secured a scholarship for this study abroad experience, did you use it towards tuition or towards program fees? Write any thoughts or reflections for us on how you used financial aid in general. You can include recommendations for other future applicants who will apply for financial aid to study abroad.**

**Q9 - Now, regarding your linguistic experiences, indicate the degree with which you agree or disagree with this statement: "I am able to speak Spanish and an/other language/s in Barcelona with peers, locals and/or other individuals in and out of the Study Center".**

STRONGLY AGREE – AGREE – NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE –  
DISAGREE – STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Q10- Please give us a commentary on any situation/s which facilitated speaking Spanish or multiple other languages at the Barcelona Study Center or while in Spain this summer.**

**Q11- Indicate the degree with which you agree or disagree with this statement: "I was able to connect with my heritage or parental language and culture while studying at the Barcelona Study Center this summer".**

STRONGLY AGREE – AGREE – NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE –  
DISAGREE – STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Q12 - Please offer a few comments on how language/s, or your heritage culture may have expanded or enriched with the study abroad opportunity at the Barcelona Study Center. Were there any specific activities that**

**contributed to the growth of your heritage language or culture? Any other reflections on your part are welcome.**

**Q13 - Aside from this study abroad opportunity, have you taken any High Impact Practices (HIP) courses while at the university? Under which HIP designation? Check all that apply.**

**Q14- If you took HIP courses in the past, did you participate in the HIP Student Showcase where students prepare a video and an optional poster? If yes, specify if you won an award/ scholarship at the showcase or use this scholarship to cover study abroad expenses? The HIP Student Showcase takes place during the Fall and Spring semesters.**

**Q15- Have you taken any internship/s while in school? If yes, please write a few comments about any past internship/s. Was it through Experiential Learning? Where and when did you intern?**

**Q16 - This completes the survey. Use this space if you want to offer any recommendations or suggestions that could be implemented to encourage more students from the university to study abroad, or if you want to give us feedback about your experience.**