

# Understanding Inclusion in Community College Education Abroad: An Investigation of Policies and Practices

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## **Abstract:**

This study explores the extent to which community college study abroad is exclusive, meaning that opportunities are restricted to certain students, or inclusive, meaning that education abroad is available to all that express interest. We administered a survey collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to leaders in community college education abroad to gain insight into inclusion in education abroad programming at their institutions. This survey was designed with an eye towards understanding how access is realized and the ways in which diversity in education abroad is supported (or not). Our results indicate that community college study abroad is neither entirely inclusive nor entirely exclusive. We conclude with a call to action for community college leaders to build a new inclusive narrative surrounding education abroad.

## **Introduction**

Open access is central to the community college mission of democratizing post-secondary education, meaning that the doors to community colleges, and the educational opportunities housed within, are open to all (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Clark, 1960). The concept of open access is embedded in most community college policies with a view to building inclusive practices that allow all students entry to take classes regardless of prior academic history, socioeconomic status, age, gender, racial or ethnic identity, or enrollment status (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Nonetheless, researchers have documented limits to accessibility embedded within community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dowd, 2003), including exclusive honors programs, placement exams, and dual enrollment agreements, which have the potential to undermine the democratizing function of community colleges (Dowd, 2003). In this context, the extent to which programs are selective and accept only certain subsets of students can, in fact, stratify educational opportunity within community colleges rather than open doors (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dowd, 2003). Given its exclusionary history (Hoffa, 2007), education abroad has the potential to be one of these programs. This article examines if and how open access extends to education abroad at U.S. community colleges and, in particular, how policies and practices might either promote or truncate inclusion.

Our purpose in this article is to explore the extent to which community college study abroad is exclusive, meaning that opportunities are restricted to certain students, or inclusive, meaning that education abroad is available to all that express interest. To achieve this goal, after reviewing key literature, we administered a survey to leaders in community college education abroad to gain insight into inclusion in education abroad programming at their institutions with an eye towards understanding how access is realized and the ways in which diversity in education abroad is supported (or not).

## Literature Review

The literature that informed our work falls into three categories: a) open access at community colleges; b) inequalities without and within community colleges; and c) open access as applied to education abroad.

### Open Access at Community Colleges

Community colleges were designed with the intent of open access. These institutions are often purposefully located within a forty-mile radius of where most students live with the idea that physical accessibility positively influences students' decisions to attend and persist in higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Open access extends the definition of who is a student, resulting in a diverse student population. Today's community colleges include students who are older, have non-traditional entry qualifications, work full-time, have family commitments, come from low-income and minoritized populations, or are first-generation college students (González Canché, 2018). Current thinking supports institutional responsibility to help students succeed, and numerous educational programs exist to achieve this goal (O'Banion, 2019). Specific programs that promote access and equity at community colleges include: College Promise programs, which offer free tuition (Kanter & Armstrong, 2019); Guided Pathways programs, which provide students specific steps to take towards degree completion (McClenney, 2019); and Baccalaureate options, which offer local opportunities to earn a Bachelor's degree (Floyd & Skolnik, 2019).

### Inequalities Without and Within the Community College

#### *External challenges.*

In spite of many programmatic resources that promote access and equity at community colleges, for many community college students, access is complicated by factors external to the community college context itself, including homelessness, food insecurity, and child-care insecurity (Walsh & Milliron, 2019), which create unequal situations in which access is compromised. Low levels of external funding from the state and weak infrastructure of the community college itself are additional examples of external inequities that impact community college students. Low budgets impact faculty salary, student-faculty ratio, student support services, and facilities maintenance, all of which affect student success (Sutin, DeAmerico, Valeau, & Raby, 2014). Moreover, an external social context that defines the community college as a "lesser-than" institution compared to universities and other four-year institutions results in a situation wherein community college students are perceived to have lower-ability and lesser skill sets (Raby, 2018) and to be in need of a "second chance" (Cohen, 1995) to attend higher education.

### *Internal contexts and tracking.*

Inequalities also exist within the community college. As a sorting mechanism, community colleges have been accused of directing students into unequal educational experiences through tracking, mostly by social class and minoritized status, a process referred to in the literature as “cooling out” (Clark, 1960). Such tracking allows some students to go into academic programs, directs others to vocational programs, and influences others to drop out of postsecondary education altogether (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen, 1971). Those that go into vocational programs are often channeled into un- or under-employment (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Contemporary tracking results as a function of pre-requisite requirements and pre-enrollment testing, which places many low-income and minoritized students into a spiral of remedial courses and situates “an artificial barrier between students, particularly low-income students and students of color, and a postsecondary credential” (Vandal, 2019, p. 146). Cohen and Brawer (2003) claim an original intent of U.S. community colleges was to “divert unsuitable [university] candidates into appropriate vocational training while making it possible for traditional universities to maintain selective admissions requirements” (p. 21). More recently, community colleges track high-ability students into honors programs, consequently limiting high-quality learning experiences to a select few (Dowd, 2003).

### *Open Access and Community College Education Abroad*

As previously noted, community college literature recognizes a tension between the open-access philosophy and community colleges’ potential contribution to stratification among postsecondary students. We propose that this tension extends to education abroad programming, offered at approximately 11% of community colleges nationwide (Whatley, 2019). While the studies highlighted in this section speak to the ways in which community colleges have the potential to provide access to study abroad to underrepresented and minoritized student populations, they do not provide insight into the extent to which this access actually happens in practice nor the specific policies that might promote or discourage access to education abroad at community colleges.

### *Admission.*

Many community colleges have transformed education abroad from a university junior year abroad with admission constraints (class standing, GPA, prerequisites) to a program that serves all students at all ability levels (Raby, 2008). In many community colleges, education abroad is available to any person over the age of 18, sometimes to high school concurrent enrollment students, to re-entry university students, and to community members. Some community colleges purposefully enroll students with low GPAs to adhere to open access (Oberstein-Delvalle, 1999), believing that all students can benefit from study abroad and that low academic preparation is not a hindrance to student success. Such practices are important as they represent the reverse of “cooling out” by offering opportunities to previously ignored populations, such as minoritized, lower-income, and non-traditional students (Raby, 1996). Open-access admissions policies for education abroad have, in many cases, transformed study abroad from an elitist endeavor wherein access was limited to a few to a system of mass accessibility (Hoffa, 2007; Raby, 2019).

### *Demographic diversity.*

While national-level statistics on study abroad students regarding characteristics such as low-income or first-generation-in-college status are not available, national-level data indicate that community college study abroad students are more diverse regarding racial and ethnic identity

compared to the study abroad student population more generally (Raby, 2008; Whatley, 2019). For example, in the 2016-17 academic year, among community college students who studied abroad, almost 40% represented non-white race/ethnicity groups, compared to around 30% for all institutions (IIE, 2018). Students who study abroad at community colleges tend to share demographic similarities with students at their same institutions who do not study abroad (Raby & Rhodes, 2018) while at the same time reflecting their local communities, many of which are comprised largely of minoritized racial and ethnic and lower-income groups (AACC, 2019).

#### *Academic diversity.*

A final way in which community colleges might promote access and equity in education abroad is through the diversity of programs offered. The multi-purpose mission of the community college includes life-long learning, remedial instruction, and technical, occupational, vocational, and academic programming (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). While university education abroad was historically academic-based (Hoffa, 2007), community college education abroad has traditionally included technical, vocational, and career education courses (Raby, 1996) and continues to offer this range today (Malveaux & Raby, 2019). This diversity in curricular offerings purportedly broadens access to education abroad for all students at the community college, regardless of field of study.

### **Conceptual Framework: Barriers and Counter-barriers**

In designing this study, we adopted a barrier/counter-barrier conceptual framework to guide our thinking about inclusive and exclusive community college education abroad policies and practices. Traditional literature on education abroad uses a barrier construct to highlight supposed deficits of students who do not participate (e.g., Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). These works build on deficit narratives that have been used to explain why some students achieve at lower levels than others. This literature also links low expectations of student success among working-class, low-income, and non-white communities to real or perceived deficiencies in financial, social, and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; Gillborn, 2005). Narratives surrounding community colleges also use a deficit narrative to explain that non-traditional students lack academic preparation to succeed and lack social and cultural capitals to know how to achieve their goals (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

In the higher education literature broadly, researchers have labelled such barrier approaches as stereotypical and obsolete (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Critical Race theories highlight the importance of additional capital resources including navigational capital (figuring out how to work within the system) and familial capital (support from family) for student success. Community college research also questions the merits of barrier research (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Chen & Starobin, 2017). Education abroad research in both community colleges and university sectors also adopt a counter-barrier perspective (e.g., Willis, 2012; Sweeney, 2013; Ficarra, 2019; Raby, 2019). Our work contributes to this line of inquiry by highlighting practices that counter barrier literature. The following sections expand on barrier and counter-barrier perspectives in the education abroad literature at four-year institutions and community colleges.

#### Purported Barriers to Studying Abroad

### *Four-year institutions.*

Research examining study abroad at four-year institutions details five categories of factors that might deter students from participating in study abroad: student demographics; family dynamics; academic conflicts; affective conflicts; and institutional structures. Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive, and many barriers to education abroad cited in this literature cross categories.

***Student Demographics.*** Low socio-economic status, and the resulting lack of funds to pay for study abroad, represents the most cited demographic barrier to study abroad participation (e.g., Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006; DeJong et al., 2010; Schnusenberg, De Jong, & Goel, 2012). This barrier is closely related to work obligations that are seen to limit the amount of time students can spend away from home because they have to work for a living, an especially poignant barrier for students who work to pay for their studies (DeJong et al., 2010; Kashlak & Jones, 1996). Literature additionally presents students who are minoritized, male, or first-generation-in-college as less likely to succeed in higher education (Kim & Bowman, 2019; Tolan & McCullers, 2018) and less likely to study abroad (e.g., Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010).

***Family Dynamics.*** A second barrier to study abroad identified in the four-year literature is family dynamics. This category includes obligations to care for and support family members, resulting in limited time that a student can spend away from home (Kashlak & Jones, 1996; Sánchez et al., 2006; Stroud, 2010). Family members can also pose a social barrier to study abroad if they label education abroad as unaffordable or an unnecessary luxury (Kasravi, 2009; Sánchez et al., 2006).

***Academic Barriers.*** Conflicts regarding academics comprise a fourth category of barriers to study abroad highlighted in the four-year literature. Chieffo (2001), among others, indicates that students in certain major fields of study are less likely to study abroad. Researchers have found that students mention scheduling conflicts and conflicts with major requirements as a primary reason for not studying abroad (Wainwright, Ram, Teodorescu, & Tottenham, 2009), and students are often concerned that studying abroad will slow their academic progress towards degree completion (McClure, Szelenyi, Niehaus, Anderson, & Reed, 2010). Wainwright et al. (2009) additionally point out a lack of faculty support for study abroad in many cases, especially among students in science fields. Finally, a generally accepted notion is that low grades “are a proxy for the likelihood of student success abroad” (Hamir & Gozik, 2018, p. 204). A lack of academic preparation among many underrepresented student groups makes it difficult for these students to achieve study abroad programs’ admission criteria (Thomas & McMahon, 1998).

***Affective Conflicts.*** Additional barriers to study abroad cited in the four-year literature can be classified as affective conflicts. Such stumbling blocks to participation include a simple uncertainty about study abroad or feelings that organizing such an experience would be a hassle or inconvenient (Brux & Fry, 2010). Affective conflicts can also be more specific, such as concerns about using a foreign language while abroad (Kashlak & Jones, 1996). Prior research has found that minoritized students in particular express concerns about experiencing racism and general safety in the study abroad environment (Brux & Fry, 2010). These students also often associate study abroad with students who are not like them, that is, students who are white and from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012).

***Institutional Structures.*** A final group of barriers to study abroad participation fall into the category of institutional structures. In this sense, researchers have sometimes found that information about study abroad opportunities is not readily accessible to students or that students are unaware of study abroad scholarships (Peterson, 2003). Moreover, students from minoritized groups often encounter difficulties navigating the institutional processes surrounding study abroad programs, such as in the application process. These barriers are not experienced by students who come to college with prior knowledge of how such institutional structures work (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012).

#### *Community colleges.*

Some community college education abroad literature mirrors the four-year literature concerning barriers to study abroad participation. These barriers include: lack of money (Amani, 2011); inability to take time away from family and/or work (Raby & Rhodes, 2005); curricular conflicts that limit free time (McKee, 2019); lack of support from administrators and faculty who view education abroad as an unnecessary luxury (Raby & Sawadogo, 2005); fear of travel (Amani, 2011); and lack of knowledge of the opportunity to study abroad (Raby & Rhodes, 2005). However, much of the community college education abroad literature approaches this topic from a counter-barrier perspective.

#### Counter-Barrier Perspectives at Community Colleges

Both community college and community college education abroad literatures indicate that the barriers just described are likely less applicable to students in this century.

#### *Student demographics.*

One way in which community college study abroad researchers have challenged a barriers perspective is by exploring how demographic characteristics can contribute to study abroad participation. That is, students who are labeled as minoritized, first-generation, or low-income actually possess multiple forms of capital that are important for college success, some of which are unique to different racial, ethnic, income, and gendered groups (Modood, 2004; Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016). For example, recent findings show that working students have more free time to study abroad (Robertson, 2019), possibly because they are less constrained by prescriptive curricular tracks than full-time, non-working students (McKee, 2019). Academic preparation is another example of how student demographic characteristics do not necessarily pose a barrier to student success in study abroad. For example, Raby, Rhodes, and Biscarra (2014) found that students enrolled in remedial classes who studied abroad progressed to completion in larger numbers than their counterparts who did not study abroad.

Cost is an important barrier to study abroad participation among all students and not just those from low-income backgrounds. Cost becomes less of a barrier when adult community college students have an increased sense of purpose (Gibson & Slate, 2010; Soria, 2012) and view study abroad as the opportunity of a lifetime (McKee, 2019; Oberstein-Devalle, 1999; Willis, 2016). These students are better able to weigh the costs against the benefits of studying abroad when they are given access to financial information, financial aid information, and planning time (Amani & Kim, 2017). Of note is that community college students often view study abroad through their institution as an affordable, and even cheap, way to travel (Amanai & Kim, 2019; Robertson, 2019).

### *Family dynamics.*

Parental support is an additional resource available to community college students that contributes substantially to their success (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005), especially among low-income students (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019) and students of color (Wood & Harris, 2015). Such support, aligned with familial capital resources (Yosso, 2005), occurs even if parents have low levels of education themselves (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Family support has been suggested as a primary resource of encouragement for studying abroad (Amani & Kim, 2019; Peterson, 2003; Robertson, 2019) because family members recognize the importance of the learning that happens through international study and travel and may have traveled or worked abroad themselves (Willis, 2012).

### *Academic support.*

While academic barriers might appear to be formidable for “second chance” students (Cohen, 1995), new student success initiatives (O’Banion, 2019) are improving academic standing for the least prepared. Likewise, constrictive academic pathways that might limit availability to study abroad are creating opportunities for students to use their free time in summer and in between academic programs for such purposes (Amani & Kim, 2019; Ward, Rhodes, & Raby, forthcoming).

### *Affective support and institutional structures.*

Faculty support contributes to students’ affective disposition towards study abroad and helps to overcome institutional structural barriers. Faculty often help students navigate both institutional bureaucracy and the financial planning necessary for study abroad participation (Brenner, 2016; Robertson, 2019) and represent key influencers who, through their personal connections with students, build trust and support (Ward, Rhodes, & Raby, forthcoming). Such support might be especially important for first-generation students (Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016), students of color (Willis, 2016), and career and technical degree-seeking students (McKee, 2019).

## **Institutional Policies and Practices**

Underlying our discussion of the counter-barrier literature is the idea that institutional policies and practices are key to issues of inclusion in community college education abroad because they either promote or discourage students from leveraging capital resources (Fernández-Kelly, 2008; O’Banion, 2019; Yosso, 2005). In the negative, a community college might reproduce inequitable power structures (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Stuber, 2011) if it does not offer education abroad or does not dedicate resources to study abroad at levels sufficient to equalize access.

On the positive, supportive policies enable students to plan their abroad experience multiple years in advance (McClure et al., 2010) and provide students with opportunities to leverage capital resources for the purpose of study abroad participation. Literature on the role of institutional programs designed for success at community colleges (Hodara & Jaggars, 2014; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019) clearly demonstrates that non-traditional students use their capitals to achieve a range of success (Kruse, Starobin, Chen, Baul, & Laanan, 2015; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Such resources include having knowledge about and motivation to study abroad. For example, community college students of color (Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016) and rural students (McKee, 2019) are aware of study abroad and know about its potential benefits, such as career readiness (Niser, 2010; Zamani-Gallaher, Lang, & Leon, 2016), and broadened intercultural awareness and increased

identity development vectors (Brenner, 2016; Drexler & Campbell, 2011; Willis, 2016). In this century, community colleges have the opportunity to put into place institutional policies and practices that effectively serve students, build students' social capital, and promote student success (O'Banion, 2019). Study abroad represents one of these opportunities (Amani & Kim, 2017; Robertson, 2019; Smith, 2019).

Our purpose in conducting the survey research described in this article was to examine the extent to which community colleges have in place supportive education abroad policies and practices that foster inclusion and equity rather than exclusion and inequality. The following section describes this research.

## Method

The previous sections highlight a tension between inclusivity and exclusivity in both policies and practices at community colleges generally and in community college study abroad specifically. Our survey research provides insight into these issues and deepens our understanding of how community colleges advance inclusion in education abroad or fail to do so. Specifically, our survey research answers the following questions:

1. What *exclusive* policies and practices are evident in the responses of individuals representing community college study abroad programs?
2. What *inclusive* policies and practices are evident in the responses of individuals representing community college study abroad programs?

To answer these two research questions, we designed a survey that was subsequently completed by 25 leaders in community college education abroad, representing 24 institutions or districts, during the summer of 2019. Our respondents account for approximately a quarter of community colleges that report offering study abroad (Raby, 2019; Whatley, 2019). We recruited survey respondents through listservs and newsletters of major international education, study abroad, and community college organizations and asked individuals to participate if they worked at a community college and organized, led, or were in some other way involved in study abroad programming.

### Survey Research Methods

Survey research is a known tool for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. From a quantitative perspective, surveys allow the researcher to collect information that, given a sufficient response rate, can be used to make more generalizable claims (Fowler, 1995). Qualitatively, survey questions can elicit written, narrative-based, and descriptive responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) that can capture participant voices, opinions, and ways of making meaning (Saldaña, 2013). The survey research design is both valid and credible to the extent that questions measure the phenomenon they are supposed to measure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To this point, we requested feedback on a pilot version of our survey from four experienced community college researchers, which we then incorporated into the survey that our participants received. The survey research design is also reliable and dependable as long as the same questions are asked of each participant and the same patterns of analysis are applied to all responses (Creswell, 2014). We followed this guidance in administering and analyzing our survey responses. One advantage of surveys that collect



both quantitative and qualitative data, such as ours, is that triangulation of these two data types provides a more detailed account of participants' perspectives.

### Survey Questions

Our survey instrument was divided into three sections. The first section sought to profile community college education abroad programming at specific colleges by asking respondents for information such as how frequently study abroad was offered, the kinds of credit students could earn through study abroad, and specific requirements for study abroad participation, such as minimum GPA or enrollment status. Many of these questions were followed with questions eliciting written responses that allowed respondents to expand upon responses given. The second section of the survey focused on initiatives that community colleges implement to promote equity and inclusion in education abroad and inquired about the demographic representativeness of study abroad students as compared to the general student population at an institution. Again, qualitative-based questions allowed respondents to provide further comments on the initiatives and their effectiveness. The final section collected information on respondents' own demographic profiles and the name of the respondent's institution. This final piece of information was used to link our survey results to data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to provide a more detailed description of the institutions represented in our survey, such as their geographic location and characteristics of the student population served.

### Respondent Profile

Respondents represented a variety of academic and administrative positions. Similar to findings in Raby and Valeau's (2019) study on leadership in community college internationalization, the most frequent position titles among our respondents were variations of Director (N=8), such as Director of Study Abroad or Director of International Programs, and Coordinator (N=8), such as Study Abroad Coordinator or Global Education Coordinator. Respondents also included faculty members (N=5), an Education Abroad Manager (N=1), a Dean (N=1), and a Global Associate (N=1). Most respondents had worked in international education for more than five years (63%, N=15) and half had been in their current position for this same amount of time (N=12). Unlike Raby and Valeau's (2019) study, respondents were overwhelmingly white (68%, N=17), with three respondents identifying as Latinx and two as Black or African American. Three respondents chose not to report their race/ethnicity identification. Over half of our respondents identified as female (56%, N=14), while nine identified as male and two chose not to indicate their gender identity. Most respondents had earned a master's degree (46%, N=11) and ten respondents (42%) indicated that they held a degree higher than a master's.

### Institutional Profile

Eighteen of our respondents worked at a single college, while three represented an entire district. One respondent represented multiple campuses, while another represented a department within a college. Twenty-two respondents supplied the name of their institution on the survey, allowing us to supplement our survey data with IPEDS data to learn more about the profiles of these institutions. Of these institutions, eight (36%) were located in cities, six (27%) in suburbs, one in a town, and three were rural institutions (14%). Respondents represented a variety of geographic locations, representing institutions in New England (N=1), the Mid-East (N=4), the Great Lakes (N=5), the Southeast (N=6), the Rocky Mountains (N=1), and the Far West (N=5). According to

2015 Carnegie Classifications, one institution was a “small” institution, while most institutions (68%, N=15) were “large” or “very large.” Ten institutions (45%) were classified as high-transfer institutions (also a 2015 Carnegie Classification), meaning that many of their students transferred to the four-year sector.

Ten of the 24 institutions represented in our survey do not report study abroad participation to the Institute of International Education (IIE)’s Open Doors report, which collects information on the number of students studying abroad from U.S. institutions of higher education on an annual basis. This finding is somewhat surprising and raises questions about the representativeness of Open Doors data regarding community colleges. It is likely that study abroad at community colleges is much more common than Open Doors data imply. While our intention in this article is not to examine the merits of Open Doors data, this discrepancy must be acknowledged.

### Analysis

To analyze our data, we applied a critical framework based on an equity design to both quantitative and qualitative data, recognizing Cokley and Awad’s (2013) strategy of: a) pilot testing our survey (as noted above); b) making the quantitative analysis participant-focused; c) avoiding comparisons that normalize one group and depict other groups as deviant; and d) honoring the lived experiences of participants. We used summary statistics to analyze questions that asked respondents to select from a number of limited choices. We used participants’ qualitative comments to capture, in their own words, how they created their own categories of meaning (Jonson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Saldaña, 2013).

The first step in analysis was data cleaning, wherein we removed blank survey responses and responses from those who did not meet eligibility criteria (e.g., participants that indicated that they did not work at a community college). To analyze narrative responses, we applied our own descriptive comments to participants’ written comments (Jeong & Othman, 2016) and then used those comments to create themes, matching those themes with literature in the field. Using both deductive and inductive processes, we applied a constant comparative coding method to compare individual survey responses. As we refined codes, we consulted with each other to note our biases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), thus adding to the overall validity of the analysis. Finally, we identified quotes to formulate thick and rich descriptions of participants’ shared experiences (Creswell, 2014). As common themes arose, an image of participants’ “voices” became clearer.

### *Study limitations.*

There are four limitations to this study. First, our respondents represent only a small group of leaders in the field. Second, our electronic survey design did not allow us to ask follow-up questions which may have added clarity to our analyses. Third, the stories that participants shared had the potential to contain identifying information. Knowing that they might be identified, participants may not have shared as openly as they would have if the survey had been entirely anonymous. Finally, our own biases as researchers who publish on topics in community college international education certainly extended to the theories we used to frame this study, the survey questions we asked, and the analyses we conducted.

## Results

Overall, respondents indicated that, on average, around 40 students per year participated in study abroad from their institutions during the 2018-2019 academic year, with one institution sending only one student abroad and another sending over 140 abroad. Our findings indicate that community college education abroad exhibits characteristics that are both exclusive and inclusive. Exclusivity is found in requirements for student participation, limited program profiles, and lack of inclusion policies. Examples of inclusivity include limited program requirements, program design, links to open access, and policies to increase inclusivity.

### Examples of Exclusivity

#### *Program requirements.*

GPA was the primary program requirement limiting access to education abroad among responding institutions. Twenty respondents indicated that their institution had a GPA requirement for study abroad participation. The lowest of these requirements was 1.5, while the highest was 3.0. Common GPA requirements were 2.0 (N=9) or 2.5 (N=5). Those with the highest GPA requirements offer education abroad in collaboration with a university. As one respondent explained, the reason for having a GPA requirement is: “Studying abroad is an educational experience that requires an added level of responsibility. Therefore, students wishing to participate in study abroad must display a history of sound academic and non-academic decision-making” (SR-11; note that each survey respondent [SR] was assigned an identification number to preserve the anonymity of responses). Another shared that “GPA [is required] to make sure we set students up for success. Studying abroad can be academically challenging with new environments [ . . . ] sometimes condensed courses, added stress because everything is new and or different and some courses are taught by local instructors, which especially in Europe may have higher grading standards” (SR-21).

Student code of conduct was another program requirement that respondents selected. Seventeen respondents indicated that their programs had a version of a student conduct requirement, meaning that a student had to be in good standing to participate in study abroad. One respondent shared that “We need students to be in good standing (C or better)” (SR-19). Another respondent noted that an emphasis on conduct “provides a warning to less prepared [students] that they need to ‘step it up’” (SR-4). Finally, one respondent said that “the study abroad program is designed to develop the student in a more robust way than simply institutional study. As such, we need to know that our students that are selected are invested into the program” (SR-18).

Other requirements included in our survey were selected by a limited number of respondents. These included a term-of-enrollment requirement (N=5), meaning that a student had to be enrolled for a certain amount of time prior to study abroad participation, a modern language requirement (N=4), and a full-time student status requirement (N=2). These requirements can limit the possibility of participating in education abroad for large portions of community college students. One college mandates “completion of English Composition with a grade of B” (SR-6) and another college mandates completion of Spanish 1, explaining that “Spanish 1 is not offered in the program abroad” (SR-22). A few colleges require a letter of recommendation to “make sure we get input from people who have observed the person that they also feel the person is a good fit for an abroad program and can handle the program emotionally and/or academically” (SR-17). Finally, one college

mandates a minimum age of 18 (preventing high school concurrent enrollment) “so students are adults and responsible for themselves. Helps with liability” (SR-21).

#### *Program profile.*

The more frequent education abroad is offered, the more likely it is that all students who want to participate are able to. Forty percent (N=10) of respondents indicated that study abroad was offered one term out of the year, 32% (N=8) offered in two terms out of the year, and 28% (N=7) offered in three or more terms out of the year. Almost all respondents indicated that students could earn credit for academic classes through study abroad (N=24), and half (N=12) said that elective credits could be earned. A few institutions awarded credit through study abroad in technical/vocational classes (N=3), workforce development classes (N=1), and career classes (N=2). Three respondents indicated that their institutions offered community service or service-learning study abroad programs and two offered non-credit study abroad (designed for community members). In explaining why some classes were more amenable to study abroad than others, one respondent said: “It is easier to fit education abroad in humanities and social science fields. It is more challenging with STEM and Health Sciences” (SR-13). Another respondent elaborated, “While I believe study abroad might fit better on a separate certificate program, community colleges (and its students) are under constant pressure to complete general education courses and stay on a set track of 2 years. A different credit or certificate program might add at least one term at our institution” (SR-17). Other respondents agreed that some programs work better than others but noted different fields of study: “Study abroad fits best with our transfer programs, health sciences, and culinary” (SR-15). Finally, exclusivity was evident in when programs are scheduled. One respondent shared that “there are a number of [on campus] programs that do not have a winter break, which is when about half of the study abroad programs are held. Also, programs in health and public safety have strict state required courses that [have] little flexibility to develop a hybrid class which they [students] can [use to] earn credits while studying abroad” (SR-1).

#### *Lack of inclusion policies.*

Fourteen representatives of our responding colleges indicated having specific inclusion statements in their college policies while nine colleges did not. The linking of inclusion to education abroad is not part of any official documentation and only seven survey participants responded to a question about how they are using inclusion strategies in their education abroad outreach. One respondent noted that “currently, the College does not have enough strategies in place to significantly improve inclusion/equity in education abroad participation. However, the newly appointed Director [ . . . ] is a member of the College’s Equity and Diversity Council. This puts the Director in a position to influence institutional priorities regarding inclusion/equity in education abroad” (SR-11).

#### *Examples of Inclusivity*

Our results also point to areas wherein community college study abroad is inclusive.

#### *Lack of or minimal program requirements.*

Two of our respondents indicated that their institution “had no requirements to study abroad” (SP-19). Others explained that since their program requirements were compatible with campus-wide policies that apply to all students, the requirements were supportive of inclusivity. One respondent

said that “students must comply to a campus review process that is not specific to education abroad” (SR-13). Another said that “students need a minimum of a 2.0 GPA to continue at the college, so [if] they don't have that GPA, they wouldn't be able to join the program” (SR-5). Yet another said “we are open enrollment and open to any student being able to study abroad. Students only need to be admitted to [the college] to study abroad” (SR-4). Many respondents shared an intent to maximize inclusivity, including one who said, “since a community college AA degree only takes an average of two years for full-time students, we try to keep the class standing as low as possible” (SP-17). Finally, respondents shared how exceptions to requirements were made to minimize exclusivity. One respondent said that “anyone anywhere can do our programs; we even allow students who struggle in coursework to participate as long as they provide evidence, they are meeting with tutoring regularly” (SR-16). Another indicated that “if the student has a low GPA, they need to write an essay to explain why GPA is low and what they are doing to raise it” (SR-7).

Respondents acknowledged the value of study abroad for all students. One respondent said that “a student with a low GPA, part-time status, non-honors, non-foreign language skills can still have a life-altering experience the minute they travel to a new place” (SR-4). Another respondent said, “Study abroad is frequently an option for the affluent or privileged students at universities. Community colleges, with open enrollment missions, aim to help anyone continue their education. This same principle applies to study abroad” (SR-14). Finally, another shared that “study abroad data (and anecdotal evidence from 10 years in the field) supports an increase in GPA post study abroad. As long as a student is not on academic probation, they should have access to development opportunities” (SR-3).

#### *Program profiles.*

Study abroad programs that are offered multiple times a year and in a range of subjects also support inclusion. As noted above, eight (32%) respondents indicated that study abroad was offered two terms out of the year and seven (28%) in three or more terms out of the year. Respondents said that students could study a variety of subject areas through study abroad. One respondent shared that “we offer many types of degree programs that can benefit from a study abroad component and experience” (SR-9). Another respondent said that “I think education abroad programs used to be a better fit for language and Humanity students, but that is no longer the case. All academic programs, including STEM and Life Science disciplines, for example, can benefit from EA [Education Abroad] programs” (SR-22).

#### *Open access and presence of inclusive policies.*

The foundational inclusive policy at the community college is open access. Twenty respondents (83%) indicated that open access was important to education abroad at their institutions. One respondent explained this importance stating that “All students are welcome to apply to study abroad, part-time and full-time. Also, the GPA requirement is relatively low, understanding that a GPA is not the only indicator to determine if a student will be successful on a study abroad program” (SR-1). Another said that “We try to have students from all walks of life and experiences participate in Study Abroad” (SR-8). Yet another said “We are a community college so anyone can participate in our programs regardless if they are a student or not. All they need to do is meet the enrollment requirements and pay the balance prior to due date” (SR-16).

Respondents also focused on the importance of open access in providing opportunities for self-betterment to everyone. One respondent shared that “All members of the community should have access to study abroad opportunities in order [to] develop themselves academically as well as professionally” (SR-5). Another said that “The general benefits of studying abroad (improving interpersonal and other job-related skills) enrich all students” (SR-21). Finally, another shared that “It is important to my office to have a diverse group of students participating in education abroad programs and we work to make sure that all students have access” (SR-3).

Survey respondents additionally mentioned other inclusive policies and associated resources that are intended to increase access to education abroad programming. By far, the most frequent means of increasing access to education abroad was through financial resources, namely scholarships, offered by 22 institutions (96%), grant aid (N=16, 70%), and loan aid (N=13, 57%). One respondent indicated that study abroad was made more accessible through “funding from partners outside the institution” (SR-12). Respondents also shared that accessibility was bolstered through schedule flexibility (N=12, 52%) and outreach to underrepresented students (N=10, 43%). Respondents indicated that such outreach was done via club, classroom, and department presentations, collaboration with TRIO and Men of Merit (a program for minority males) programs, assistance with Gilman Scholarship essays, and e-mails about scholarship opportunities. Many respondents noted that inclusive policies appeared to have a positive impact. One respondent said: “I want to believe the Life Program does help, but we have not analytics to corroborate that” (SR-1). Another said that the “Male Access Network (M.A.N.) Initiative is a student support and engagement program offered by Global Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) with an emphasis on college success, character-building and leadership development. This program is intended for male-identified students at [ . . . ] College who are interested in getting involved on-campus, connecting with other [ . . . ] College men, and receiving mentorship opportunities. Retention & completion rates have increased” (SR-18). Another respondent shared: “Our office (International Education) in general is the one responsible for spearheading initiatives to advance inclusion and equity in education abroad. We try to re-invest funds (around \$10,000.00) collected from other initiatives abroad into scholarships and grants for semester and short-term faculty-led programs” (SR-17). Finally, in explaining a growth in the number of underrepresented students studying abroad, a respondent shared that “We have seen an increase especially over the last 3 years I’ve been working here. We have been honored by Dept. of State Benjamin A. Gilman for Greatest Growth of [underrepresented] students” (SR-31).

### Demographic Representation

A final test of inclusivity that is often used in the field is a comparison of the demographics of students who study abroad with the general student population (Whatley, 2019). While it is easy to compare these numbers using IPEDS data, it is nonetheless a difficult process for community colleges since most do not keep demographic information on their study abroad students (Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016). Not surprisingly, only ten respondents in our study indicated that they kept demographic data for 2018-2019 study abroad students.

Of those ten colleges, only three indicated that the students who participate in study abroad mirror the general student population. Eight of these provided details on participant race/ethnicity and six provided data regarding gender (note that while non-binary was provided as an option on

our survey, no institution indicated a number of study abroad participants in this particular gender category). Because we were able to link our data to IPEDS data, we were then able to compare the demographic distribution of study abroad students with the demographic composition of student populations generally. IPEDS data were taken from Fall 2017 enrollments from these community colleges, the most recent year for which data are currently available. Table 1 displays these comparisons.

**Table 1. Demographic Comparisons between Study Abroad Students and All Students**

	Study Abroad	All Students
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.16%	0.71%
Asian	3.77%	4.25%
Black or African American	10.14%	14.97%
Hispanic	8.41%	11.83%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.29%	0.17%
White	69.86%	57.79%
Two or more race	3.19%	2.50%
Race/ethnicity unknown	3.19%	7.78%
Male	26.74%	47.19%
Female	73.26%	52.81%

For these institutions, in regard to gender, study abroad student demographics are not representative of their institutions. Approximately half of all Fall 2017 enrollments were male while only a quarter of those who studied abroad were. On the other hand, the comparisons in Table 1 show a more complex story in regard to race and ethnicity. Three groups, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Two or more races are over-representative of the total student populations at these institutions. The study abroad participation rates for these three race/ethnicity groups are similar to those reported nationally for community colleges in IIE's Open Doors (2018). On the other hand, at these colleges, participation rates for Hispanic (or Latinx) and African American students are much lower than their representation in the general student population. These findings are inconsistent with the percentages reported in IIE's Open Doors report and may be due to the number of respondents to our survey who are not represented in Open Doors. Finally, at these institutions, Asian students are represented in study abroad at almost the same rate as they are in the general student population.

## Discussion

This study used a barrier and counter-barrier conceptual framework to explore the extent to which policies and practices in community college education abroad foster inclusivity and exclusivity. Taken as a whole, our results do not provide a preponderance of evidence in favor of either of these two categories regarding community college study abroad in general. That is, the policies and practices uncovered in our survey were not overwhelmingly exclusive, nor were they overwhelmingly inclusive. Instead, our findings illuminate how practitioners struggle to balance an open access mission while maintaining what some see as important standards in the field, such as selection

criteria for participating in study abroad (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2019). For example, most of our respondents indicated that their institutions have some requirements for participating in study abroad, usually GPA and Code of Conduct, while at the same time indicating that open access is important to the mission of study abroad and that they see many of their policies as supporting this notion. Selection criteria reflect a belief that some students are more likely to succeed in study abroad than others (Hamir & Gozik, 2018), and many of our respondents' written comments aligned with this belief. At the same time, respondents defended these requirements, stating that they were in-line with institution-wide policy that is equally applied to all students. Many respondents acknowledged that study abroad was for everyone.

Such struggles between exclusivity and inclusivity were embedded in many of respondents' comments. For example, one individual, when reflecting on a survey question, said: "In practice, we are extremely inclusive, but not as much on paper – I'm going to have to fix that!" (SR-4). Another shared concern for how inequities might result from their policies such as "requiring a clean record for education abroad without an appeals process can prohibit students from applying" (SR-3). Moreover, inclusive and exclusive policies and practices sometimes existed even within the same institution. Several respondents talked about exclusive policies that are applied to consortia programs with universities but not to programs sponsored by the community college itself. Others mentioned that they mandated different requirements corresponding to credit-study abroad programs for students and for community members, which were more inclusive for community members. These reflections from respondents may indicate the first steps in critical evaluation for building a more inclusive narrative surrounding community college study abroad.

### Building a New Narrative: Implications for Practice

The field of education abroad has been built on exclusionary practices. Since its origins in the junior year abroad, which catered to the economic elite (Hoffa, 2007), policies and practices have defined who can and who cannot study abroad (Ficarra, 2019; Sweeney, 2013; Whatley & Stich, forthcoming). Since 1968, community colleges have challenged this exclusivity by allowing a wide frame of students to study abroad (Malveaux & Raby, 2019). Today, community colleges have a rare opportunity to eschew the pathway paved by universities and other exclusive four-year institutions in favor of celebrating their own uniqueness as they create their own foundation for study abroad.

Applying what we learned in this study, there are three areas where community college leadership should question policies and practices. First is a re-focus on where and when study abroad admission policies help or hinder student learning. When policies hold all students to the same criteria (e.g., a minimum GPA requirement set by the institution), such criteria can then apply to other contexts, including study abroad. Regarding GPA requirements specifically, leaders should consider that both community college (Oberstein-Delvalle, 1991; Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2014) and university literature agree (Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Trooboff, Cressey, & Monty, 2004) that low GPA students perform satisfactory abroad and that some of these students will have greater than average academic gains post-study abroad. That is, these students often have the most to gain from study abroad participation. Similarly, there is a need to put into context practices that assess the capabilities of students to go abroad when those students are adults who have sound decision-making capabilities (Raby, 2018).



Second, our results invite leaders to consider a re-focus on program design in terms of when programs are offered and in what subjects. Sufficient data indicate that students want to and can study abroad during the entire academic year and, more importantly, that there is no basis for choosing one term over another (Raby & Rhodes, 2005; Raby & Valeau, 2016; Robertson, 2019). Similarly, community college leaders should consider study abroad program designs that are multi-curricular and that do not favor one discipline or curricular track over another. As shown in our survey, such designs ensure that study abroad programming is available to as wide a variety of students as possible.

Finally, community college leaders need to further consider how programs and policies can ensure that study abroad students are representative of the general student population at their institutions demographically. When asked, some respondents indicated that reasons for keeping demographic records included monitoring outreach to under-represented groups, compliance with IIE Open Doors, and recruiting purposes. One respondent said that “I believe our study abroad programs reach diverse programs of study and allow us to draw on diverse student populations across campus” (SR-2), while another noted, “because we serve so many, we try to keep on top of WHO we are serving” (SR-4). Thus, while progress is being made, as shown to an extent in our sample, demographic democratization is not consistent among all community colleges. In part, leaders should question a belief that the community college is already diverse and that there is no need to target specific students to maintain that diversity (Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016). Change in this area begins with a re-consideration of why community colleges seldom collect data on the demographics of study abroad students. New means of data collection for the purpose of informing open access would allow community college leaders to reach a better understanding of where gaps in participation reside.

### **Future Considerations**

While our study offers a first step towards understanding how community colleges might best foster inclusivity in education abroad, there is much room for future work. Additional research examining how program design intersects with student demographics can provide insight into where limits to participation occur. In terms of who studies abroad, the field requires a greater understanding of existing demographic data, especially as it applies to students who are often stereotyped, such as first-generation or low-income students.

Current research on first-generation students shows that, in contrast to barrier-focused research, these students are: a) dedicated to college and place value on earning a college degree; b) have the ability to overcome challenging situations and stressful events; c) find comfort in social situations and the ability to communicate with others; d) desire involvement in campus activities and exhibit an emotional attachment to the institution; e) place value on academics and attentiveness to coursework; and f) have confidence in their ability to achieve academic success (Kim & Bowman, 2019). This counter-barrier argument extends to the supports given to first-generation college students by parents who want their children to succeed (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) and to the range of social capital (Kao & Rutherford, 2007) that leads these students to success (Baum & Flores, 2011). In fact, Kim and Bowman (2019) show that there were few significant differences between types of first-generation students when predicting college satisfaction with academics and social life and quality of interactions with faculty and other students. Similar counter-barrier findings

emerge from Tolan and McCullers (2018), who present one of the few studies of first-generation students in university study abroad. None of the respondents to our survey mentioned first-generation students as a concern. Future work is needed to address this student population in community college study abroad.

A second future topic of study is a greater exploration of students' socio-economic status as it relates to study abroad participation. It has long been believed that students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds have unique struggles in college and in studying abroad (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). However, these beliefs are often based on untested assumptions about these students or on research that uses Pell recipient status as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Newer research shows that Pell status is not a reliable indicator of lower socioeconomic status as Pell Grants can be awarded to a range of income levels. In some contexts, low-income students cannot get Pell Grants while other students do (Delisle, 2017; Harwell, 2018; Rosinger & Ford, 2019). While almost all of our survey respondents shared that providing financial assistance to students is essential to inclusive study abroad practices, we do not currently know the extent to which Pell status determines who receives financial aid for study abroad.

## Conclusion

In a recent article, de Wit and Jones (2019) proposed that inclusion and access in international education are different things because “it is not enough to open the doors” (para. 3). That is, providing access might do little to include those at community colleges who are traditionally excluded from such educational opportunities or to ensure that they benefit from education abroad similarly to other students. Inclusion encompasses not only opening the doors, but also targeting those who have been excluded from international activities and providing them with high-quality experiences. The inclusion policies that our survey respondents shared show how some community colleges are beginning to think in this direction. They view internationalization for all as only the “starting point for institutional strategies” (de Wit & Jones, 2019, para. 4), similar to the community college open access mandate. We close this article with a call to action for community college leaders to take the next step towards inclusion. While community college education abroad has the potential to further stratify an already stratified student population by both including and providing high quality-experiences to some student groups rather than others (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dowd, 2003), it also has the opportunity to disrupt an exclusive study abroad narrative. Leaders must critically evaluate their policies and practice in favor of the latter scenario.

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