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Promoting Student Retention, Completion, and Intercultural Growth Through Short-Term Study Abroad

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Abstract

Short term study abroad use by community colleges has been on the rise. This study looks at the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs at a community college. The study examines the use of these programs in promoting student retention, completion, and growth in intercultural competence. By looking at student retention and completion rates among the students who have participated in a short-term program and comparing them to the overall student population at the same college, the effectiveness of the programs is examined. Also, the study looks at student growth in intercultural competence using qualitative methods.

Abstract in Spanish

El uso de estudios a corto plazo en el extranjero por parte de los colegios comunitarios ha ido en aumento. Este estudio analiza la eficacia de los programas de estudios a corto plazo en el extranjero en un colegio comunitario. El estudio examina el uso de estos programas para promover la retención, finalización y crecimiento de los estudiantes en la competencia intercultural. Al observar las tasas de retención y finalización entre los estudiantes que han participado en un programa a corto plazo y comparándolos con la población general de estudiantes en el mismo colegio, se examina la eficacia de los programas. Además, el estudio

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se fija en el crecimiento de los estudiantes en la competencia intercultural utilizando métodos cualitativos.

Keywords:

Community college, completion, intercultural competence, retention, short term, study abroad

Introduction

Community colleges around the nation have made strides to internationalize their campuses (Mapp, 2012; Raby, 2020). The colleges realize that it is important for their students to have knowledge of the world around them. There is a rising demand for graduates to have a knowledge of the increasing globalization of the workforce (North Carolina Community Colleges, n.d.). One way that community colleges have attempted to globalize their campuses is to offer short-term study abroad options for their students. Questions have arisen, however, about the effectiveness and return on investment of time, energy, and financial resources of short-term study abroad experiences in terms of heightening students' cultural awareness (Whatley, 2021). This study was built on earlier studies and examines short-term study abroad in regard to student retention, completion, and growth in intercultural competence.

Throughout the history of community colleges, the focus has been to serve and educate the community in which they were located. The aim was to model their programs around the specific needs of the surrounding community. Over time, community colleges have realized that there is a need to educate their students not only about the community in which they are located, but also about the world around them (Perry et al., 2012). Since businesses and education are becoming more globalized, there has been an increasing demand for community colleges to globalize their curriculum. This expanded curriculum allows students attending the community college to graduate with a more globalized focus and be more prepared for the globalized workforce (Davidson-Davie Community College, n.d.-a). One method community colleges can use to globalize their curricula is to offer students study abroad experiences. Short term study abroad is often used to give community college students a study abroad experience. This trend of more community colleges offering short-term study abroad programs for their students, with a concurrent look at the history

and advancement of the practice, sets the background for a better understanding of the purpose of the study.

Background of the Problem

For many years, study abroad was an activity only for students at traditional four-year colleges and universities. In recent years, however, community colleges and other two-year associate colleges have begun to develop study abroad experiences for their students (Whatley, 2020). For the purpose of this study, the term community college will be used to refer to the type of institution being examined. Mapp (2012) noted this trend to offer study abroad experiences to community college students came about because students spend a shorter amount of time at community colleges than students at traditional four-year colleges and universities. Short-term study abroad opportunities appealed to community college students because they were less expensive and required less time for students to spend away from families and job responsibilities compared to what a long-term, full-semester study abroad experience requires (Whatley, 2020).

Community college short term study abroad programs have been developed to help students gain global skills (Davidson-Davie, n.d.-b). While traditional colleges and universities and community colleges agree on the importance of study abroad opportunities, what has not been examined thoroughly is the effectiveness of short term study abroad in promoting college retention and completion among students attending community colleges (Whatley, 2020).

The advancement of short-term study abroad raises the question of how these programs are tied to achieving the goals that community colleges hold (Whatley, 2021). With the common problem of tight budgets, community colleges must examine practices to ensure they are allocating resources toward efforts that help them reach their goals. If practices that are costing the college precious resources are not producing results or helping the college achieve its goals, those practices must be examined, and decisions must be made on whether they should continue.

In the past decade, community colleges have increasingly begun instituting and promoting short-term study abroad programs (Whatley, 2020). The programs are seen as a way for community colleges to internationalize their institutions (Gwillim & Karimova, 2021; Raby et al., 2021).

In recent years, common practices among community colleges have centered around several buzzwords. The terms retention, completion, and globalization have become popular among community colleges (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Traditionally, retention and completion numbers among community colleges have remained below those of four-year colleges and universities (McGhee, 2020). Also, the traditional focus of community colleges has been on the issues and programs that are found in the service area of the college. Community colleges recognized that the lower retention and completion numbers, as well as the rising need for students to understand the world around them, demanded that work be done to address these issues (McNair et al., 2016).

One way to address the problem of globalization or internationalization of the campus has been to create short-term study abroad programs. The creation of short-term study abroad programs at many community colleges began as a way to teach students about the ever-growing globalization of the world and the workforce that students would soon find themselves inhabiting (Raby et al., 2021). Short-term study abroad programs have been designed to help students learn about other cultures so they would be suitably prepared when they enter the global workforce. The need for growth of intercultural competence among community college students has become a goal of many community colleges (Davidson-Davie Community College, n.d.-b). Short-term study abroad has become a practice to reach this goal. Community colleges have also begun to look at their retention and completion rates and realized changes needed to be made in both areas (McGhee, 2020). One strategy community colleges are adopting is creation of short-term study abroad programs (McNair et al., 2016) to address retention and student success challenges.

This study was designed to determine if short-term study abroad helps community colleges achieve their goals of retention, completion, and student growth in intercultural competence. Do community college students who study abroad persist and complete their program? Furthermore, does short term study abroad help students gain intercultural competence? Results of this study regarding student retention, completion, and cultural competence may provide community colleges with the insights they need to create valuable short-term study abroad programs.

Purpose of the Study

The rising popularity of instituting short-term study abroad programs at community colleges justifies a detailed look at the effectiveness of the programs. Community colleges often have tight budgets and limited resources (Whatley, 2020), so a study to determine if short term study abroad programs are worth the cost is needed.

This study looks at the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs in helping to retain and graduate students, as well as improve intercultural competence at a community college in North Carolina. The college is viewed as a leader among community colleges in international education. In 2021, the college was awarded the NAFSA Senator Paul Simon Award for Overall Campus Internationalization (NAFSA, n.d.). This award highlights the importance the college places on international education, of which short term study abroad plays a part. A brief look at the history of short-term study abroad programs at the college highlights the importance of the study.

The goal of these programs is to help students gain experience in an increasingly global world. The college's mission is to "provide innovative and equitable learning experiences to empower individuals, transform lives, and prepare students for enhanced career and educational opportunities within a changing global community" (Davidson-Davie Community College, n.d.-a). The mission of the college shows the importance that is placed upon international education. Short-term study abroad is part of the plan to fulfill and accomplish that mission.

Development of a global workforce extends beyond the college's mission; it is also a goal of the North Carolina Community College System. The state system office website states that part of the mission of the fifty-eight community colleges is to "develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce" (North Carolina Community Colleges, n.d.). One of the goals is that every community college in North Carolina develop programs, such as short-term study abroad, that will help students develop these global skills.

Significance of the Study

Examining the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs in student growth in intercultural competence, student retention, and student completion is important and adds to the significance of the study.

As mentioned before, this study examines how effective short-term study abroad is in student growth in intercultural competence, retention, and completion of their degree program. Each one of these items is significant for community college success (Raby et al., 2014). The study examines the three areas by looking at students who have studied abroad while enrolled at the college.

It is important to note that short-term study abroad programs are a large part of the college's international education program. The study looks at how short-term study abroad programs help the international education program meet the college's goal of developing a global workforce (Davidson-Davie Community College, n.d.-a). Study results will help the college determine the value of investing time, energy, and financial resources into short term study abroad programs.

The study will also examine whether participation in a short-term study abroad program raises student retention and completion rates. This study question is significant because the college, along with other community colleges, is looking for ways to raise student retention and completion rates (Raby et al., 2014). Results will inform short term study abroad program development for the college and other community colleges in the state and the country.

Another point of significance is that the study will help determine which students are participating in short term study abroad programs and if there are groups of students who are not participating in the programs. The college works to bring equitable solutions to the students (Davidson-Davie Community College, n.d.-a). Findings from the study will help the college and other community colleges determine if work needs to happen to encourage and include groups of students who are not participating in the short-term study abroad programs.

One of the areas the study will examine is student growth in intercultural competence. There has been much research of growth in intercultural competence as a result of study abroad programs (Mapp, 2012; Opengart, 2018; Song, 2020). Although much research has been completed in this area, few studies have examined this growth as a result of participation in short term study abroad programs (Whatley, 2020). Even fewer studies specifically examined the growth that occurred as a result of community college short term study abroad programs (Whatley, 2021). This study aims to fill the gap of research that differentiates traditional four-year colleges and universities from

community college short term study abroad programs. This proposed study also examines the correlation between community college short term study abroad participation and student retention and completion rates. Many studies were found on community college student retention and completion rates methods used to retain students and reasons why students persist to graduation (McNair et al., 2016). There is a gap in the literature between studies on community college student retention and completion and the role that short term study abroad plays in retention and completion (Raby et al., 2014). A study that reveals a correlation between short term study abroad participation and student retention and completion rates add to the significance of findings and could lead to creation and promotion of short-term study abroad programs with community college students. See Figure 1 for a synthesis of the study.

If a positive effect can be determined, the advancement of community college participation in short-term study abroad programs should be promoted and students encouraged to participate. Also, community colleges could promote these programs not only as good experiences for students, but also as a great educational benefit for the student.

Literature Review

The number of students participating in short-term programs of less than eight weeks has been rising rapidly to a point where over half (56%) of all study abroad participants are doing short-term experiences (Mapp, 2012). There are several reasons for this rise in popularity including a shorter time commitment to gain intercultural experience, less time away from program coursework, employment and family responsibilities, and lower costs (Whatley, 2020).

Because of the shorter amount of time that students would have to be away from their school work and homes, community colleges have begun to offer many short-term study abroad opportunities. Short-term study abroad fits well with community college students (Whatley, 2020). Often these students cannot afford to be away from employment or away from their families for extended amounts of time. Short-term study abroad allows these students to experience international education without disrupting their coursework, employment, or supporting their families. A short-term study abroad experience also allows a more accessible option for students who have never

had the opportunity to study abroad, and for those who have never even travelled in a plane before (Whatley, 2020).

The research question that comes to the forefront when considering whether short-term study abroad is a viable option is whether short term study abroad is as valid as traditional, longer study abroad programs. Multiple studies have been conducted to examine this point. “Most research to date has supported that greater change occurs in long-term than in short-term study abroad experiences” (Mapp, 2012, p. 728). Although much research confirms that long-term study abroad produces greater change, several studies have shown that short-term study abroad offers benefits to participants looking to gain intercultural awareness (Wood, 2019).

Research on short-term study abroad experiences has documented a variety of desired outcomes. These outcomes include increased functional knowledge, personal growth, and cross-cultural awareness (Mapp, 2012). In another study, Perry et al. (2012) found that a short-term study abroad experience can have a profound effect in the development of an individual’s growth and worldview. In a qualitative study, Taverney (2016) found that a group of former students who participated in a short-term study abroad felt the experience helped them gain confidence and improved their professional development.

In much of the research about study abroad the students who were more likely to participate highlighted positive factors that included “parental educational attainment, female sex, attitude toward literacy, openness to diversity, majoring in a social science, and participating in diverse interactions and co-curricular activities during the first year of college” (Whatley, 2021, p. 109). Negative factors to study abroad participation were male students who were involved in high school extracurricular activities, those not enrolled in a liberal arts institution, and those receiving a federal grant to attend school (Whatley, 2021).

Retaining students, especially for community colleges, has become a topic of considerable concern. Much research has been completed about how colleges can help retain students (Tinto, 2005). Community colleges have been especially cognizant of student retention and supportive of the research on how to improve their retention rate (Bailey et al., 2015). A current trend in education is to provide funding for community colleges according to the college’s retention

and completion rates (“Analytics and Reporting”, North Carolina System Office Website, n.d.). Because of this trend, community colleges look to improve their retention rates so that they are able to attain maximum funding.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) has identified ten high-impact practices that impact retention. These practices are first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, service learning, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, study abroad, and other experiences with internships and capstones. In a qualitative study examining why students choose to participate in these high impact practices, Grabsch et al. (2021) found that students are encouraged to participate when they see the worth in participating, the practice aids in fulfilling degree requirements, and marketing has been established to properly communicate the previous two reasons to participate.

In addition to retention, student completion research was examined to determine if short term study abroad contributed to degree completion. Much of the research concerning student retention also looks at student completion (Tinto, 2005). Tinto noted that it stands to reason that students who are retained in school should eventually complete their programs.

Student completion at community colleges has traditionally been low and is a critical issue (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Community colleges play an important role in student access to education for a wide variety of students. Although students can access education, “graduation rates show that access alone is not enough” (p. 97). Margarit and Kennedy explored the relationship between background, financial, and academic variables and students’ timely graduation at a community college. The researchers determined that the single greatest determinate if a student graduates was not the variables that they set to examine, but the students’ overall satisfaction with the college. “This finding underscored the fallacy of relying on students’ socioeconomic backgrounds or high school performances for explaining their success or failure in college” (p. 112). Instead of focusing on the students’ background, the research points to academic integration as the main factor of student completion (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019).

Tinto’s (2005) research examined both retention and completion. Tinto’s (2015) later research promoted the idea of focusing on student persistence over

retention. If students persist at the college or university, then the college or university's retention and completion rates will rise. The focus for colleges and universities should not be on their rates of retention and completion, but on the students and what allows them to persist (Tinto, 2005; Tinto, 2015). The idea behind Tinto's (1975) research found that colleges and universities should work to integrate the student into the institution which will allow them to persist. Although Tinto referred to his research as focused on integration, retention and completion efforts and goals, Astin (1984) and Kuh et al. (2005) referred to the same concepts as student involvement and engagement. Although the focus is slightly different for each of these researchers, the goal is the same, which is, to get the students actively involved in the college so they are more likely to persist and finish their program (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 2005).

Student persistence is important for student completion, according to the aforementioned studies. Does study abroad play a part in student integration and persistence? In a study which examined a semester long study abroad program and student degree attainment, the researchers determined that study abroad is a factor in degree attainment. Xu et al. (2013) had similar findings. Their study concluded that since the data showed that study abroad does promote degree attainment, it should be integrated into student programs earlier in their college careers.

Research Questions

This study will address the following three research questions. The term "retention" in this study is being operationalized as student enrollment in the college for the next college term after participation in a short-term study abroad program. The term "completion" in this study is being operationalized as student completion of a certificate, diploma, or associate degree in 150% of the program time after participating in a short-term study abroad program.

- **Research Question 1:** How does student participation in a short-term study abroad program affect the student retention rate?
- **Research Question 2:** How does student participation in a short-term study abroad program affect the student completion rate?
- **Research Question 3:** What are faculty and staff leader perspectives about student growth in intercultural competence after the students' participation in a short-term study abroad program?

Research Design

This study uses a mixed method research design. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to answer the research questions. This type of mixed method research advances the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data into a study (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013).

To answer the first two questions about student retention and completion after participating in a short-term study abroad program requires support from the International Education Office at the college. The International Education Office will help the researcher identify the students who have participated in a short-term study abroad program. Once the students have been identified, data will be collected from the college data system about their retention and completion after participating. This data will be compared to data collected from the college's data system about the rate of retention and completion rates of the college. The questions and the procedure for examining the questions are below:

1. How does student participation in a short-term study abroad program affect the student retention rate?

Quantitative data will be used to answer this question. The data about those who have participated in a short-term study abroad program will be put into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet contains the semester that the student participated in a short-term study abroad program. The spreadsheet also documents the student enrolled in courses the semester immediately after the participation in the short-term study abroad program. By collecting this data, a retention rate for students can be determined after their participation in a short-term study abroad program. These data will be compared to the overall retention rate at the college during the same time period. The data from the two sources will be examined by using a Proportion Z Test.

2. How does student participation in a short-term study abroad program affect the student completion rate?

For this question, quantitative data will be used. The data about those who have participated in a short-term study abroad program will be put into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet contains the semester that the student participated in a short-term study abroad program. The spreadsheet also contains documents if the student finished their academic program within 150%

of the time of the program. By collecting this data, a completion rate for students will be determined after their participation in a short-term study abroad program. This data will be compared to the overall completion rate at the college during the same time period.

3. What are faculty and staff leader perspectives about student growth in intercultural competence after the students' participation in a short-term study abroad program?

This research question will be examined using a qualitative method of data collection. Faculty who have led a short-term study abroad program at the college during the years of 2013 – 2020 will be surveyed. The survey (see Appendix B) contains 17 questions to garner responses about the faculty's perceptions of students during and after participation in a short-term study abroad program at the college. The data will be examined using thematic data analysis to determine if the faculty perceived growth in student intercultural competence as a result of participation.

The survey will be distributed to faculty and staff who have led a short-term study abroad program for the college. The survey was developed by adapting parts of the Global Perspectives Index which was developed by Iowa State University (n.d.). The first 7 questions of the survey are adaptations of this index. The final 10 questions were developed by the researcher after conversations with the Director of International Education at the college.

The first fourteen questions of the survey were designed to measure some aspect of intercultural competence. These survey questions, answered by faculty leaders of a short-term study abroad program, deal either with perceived student growth in intercultural competence, or with student contact with the new culture. The answers to the questions should show that either students exhibited some sort of growth, or that growth in intercultural competence was not observed.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected and analyzed by the author of this study. The Director of International Education at the college identified the students who participated in a study abroad program at the college since 2013. Once the students who have studied abroad with the college were identified, the author began to build the data.

The data was compiled by building a data set. The author used the college data system to determine if the student was retained and if the student completed a program in 150% of the program time. Also, data was collected about when the students participated in a study abroad program, if they enrolled the next academic semester, and if they completed their academic program within 150% of the time after participating. This data was used to answer questions one and two of the study. The student information was kept confidential at all times and access was limited to the author of the study. Permission to gather and use the data was granted by the college for the study.

Data for the third question about growth in intercultural competence will be collected by a survey given to faculty who have led a short-term study abroad program for the college. The survey will be given to the faculty once they have completed the informed consent form. Faculty will answer the survey anonymously. The faculty will not be asked to provide their names or the year in which they led a short-term study abroad program. Once the qualitative data from the survey are collected, the author of the study will compile the data in order to report the findings.

Study Results

After the data was gathered and operationalized using the proper statistical methods, the results showed several significant trends. The first two research questions were examined using proportion Z tests to determine the statistical validity of the results for the first two questions. Thematic analysis was used to examine the third research question about intercultural competence.

Student Retention

The first research question was designed to examine whether participation in a short-term study abroad program at the college raised student retention rates. The retention rates of the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program during the 2013 to 2020 school years were compared to the retention rates of the college as a whole during the same time period.

Institutional research at the college provided the overall spring to fall retention numbers during the highlighted time period. During that time, the

college enrolled 25,242 students in the spring semesters, and 17,614 were retained into the next fall semester. This is a 69.8% retention rate.

The data set for students who participated in a short-term study abroad was created with the cooperation of the International Education Office at the college. After the students who participated were identified by the International Education Office, the data set was built by determining whether a student enrolled in the next semester after participating in a short-term study abroad program. During this time period, 167 students participated. Of those 167 students, 141 were retained in the next semester. This is an 84.4% retention rate among those who specifically participated in a short-term study abroad program.

To determine if the results were statistically significant, the results were examined using a two-tailed proportion Z test. When the numbers were statistically examined, the proportion Z test, the results for student retention were $Z = -4.0996$, $p < .00001$. The results of the test show that there is a significant difference between the two populations, and that there is a very small probability that similar results could occur at random.

The test determines that the null hypothesis, that there is no difference in the retention rates of the two populations, can be rejected. The alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a difference in the retention rates of the two populations, should be accepted. The results also show a strong significant difference in the populations. The results showed that there was a significant effect in student retention among the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program at the college.

Student Completion

The second research question was designed to determine if participation in a short-term study abroad program at the college increased student completion rates. In order to examine this question, the completion rates of the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program were compared to the completion rate of the whole population at the college. The rates were examined using the same time period as mentioned in the first research question.

Just like before in the first research question, the overall completion rates for the above-mentioned time period was pulled by Institutional Research

at the college. For the study, completion was defined as the student completing their program in 150% of the program time. As an example, if a student was enrolled in an associate degree program which had a two-year program length, the student would have had to complete the associate's degree within three years to be counted as a completer for the study. Completion rates at the college have been on the rise. At the beginning of the identified time period the completion rate, by the definition, was 25%. At the end of the identified time period, the college had a completion rate of 41.5%. Overall, the completion rate at the college was 35.8% for the identified time period with an unduplicated enrollment of 17,829.

As before, the data set to determine the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program and their completion rates was built with the help of the International Education Office at the college. Looking at the completion rate for the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program, the data set showed that of the 167 students who participated, 112 completed their program within 150% of the program time. This is a 67.1% completion rate among these students.

To determine if the results were statistically significant, a two-tailed proportion Z test was used to test the results. The results of the proportion Z test were $Z = -8.383$, $p < .00001$. As with the results of the first research question, the results show that there was a significant statistical difference between the populations, and that there is a very small probability that the result could occur at random.

The null hypothesis that states that there is no difference in the completion rates of the two populations is to be rejected. The alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a difference between the completion rates of the two populations, should be accepted. The results of the test showed that there is a statistical difference in the two populations, therefore participation in short term study abroad programs did have a positive effect on student program completion.

Student Growth in Intercultural Competence

The third research question examined whether the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program exhibited growth in intercultural competence. This research question was examined by using a thematic analysis qualitative research method. Faculty and staff that had led a

short-term study abroad program at the college participated in a survey that aimed to determine if they witnessed growth in intercultural competence among the student participants.

The survey contained seventeen questions, all of which dealt with growth in some aspect of intercultural competence. The data collected from the survey was examined and categorized according to commonalities of the responses. The goal of the data collection was to determine if the faculty and staff were able to observe student growth as a result of participation in the short-term study abroad program.

Learning on a Short-Term Study Abroad Program

One of the main themes that emerged in the survey was that student learning on a short-term study abroad program has to be very intentional. The time that a student is in the other country is short. In order for learning and growth to occur, then the leaders need to be intentional that students understand the culture in which they find themselves.

The survey responses point to the fact that a student's time in the other country is short. Learning does occur, but the leader and the program design needs to be very intentional to foster student intercultural learning.

Importance of Interaction with the Locals

Another topic that was often mentioned was that interaction with the local citizens needed to occur so that student growth and learning could be heightened. The respondents mentioned that when students were able to speak with locals during the short-term study abroad program, the program became more effective. Another theme that developed with local interaction was that program leaders often gained enjoyment from watching the student interaction with local citizens.

The responses show the importance that the leaders of the short-term programs placed on local interaction. In short programs, this interaction was important for student growth. The faculty felt that local interaction should be included in the short-term study abroad programs.

Importance of a Class Before the Program Begins

One of the requirements of the study abroad program at the college is that students are required to take a class that meets for four three-hour class sessions before the study abroad program begins, and once after the program

has been completed. In this class, the faculty lead teaches the students about the program country, travel expectations, and cultural differences that the students will encounter. In the survey, the respondents often mentioned the importance of and the intentionality of learning that needs to occur in this class.

Faculty and staff felt that the class was an important part of the student learning experience. The class helped set up the intercultural learning that would occur once the students arrived in their program country.

Intercultural Learning

A final theme that was woven throughout the survey was that the faculty and staff observed intercultural learning in the students. By understanding cultural differences in which the short-term study abroad program was located and having interaction with the locals, students were able to experience intercultural learning and grow in intercultural competence as a result of the program. Intercultural learning is deeper than just understanding the culture. Students who understand cultural differences and why they occur, can then apply this learning to their personal life. Once this learning is applied to the context of their lives, then their life interactions will change. Intercultural learning entails that students experience, see, and apply the learning into their lives (Perry et. al., 2012; Wood, 2019). This is the goal of colleges when running the programs, so that the students become global citizens ready to live in an interconnected world. Even though the programs were short, student learning was observed.

The survey responses show the intercultural learning in students that the faculty and staff observed during the short-term study abroad program. This intercultural learning shows a growth in intercultural competence among the student participants. Not only did the students learn during the short-term study abroad programs, but the faculty and staff also expressed that they experienced growth during the programs.

Overall, the data from the survey consistently pointed to student growth and learning as a result of the short-term study abroad program. Although some of the responses indicated that sometimes the learning may be limited due to the length of the program, learning still did occur. The faculty and staff leaders felt that the short-term study abroad programs offered by the college provided a great benefit to the participants. Not only do students learn during the short-term study abroad programs, but the faculty and staff leaders learn as well.

Discussion of Findings

Research on study abroad has documented that it is beneficial for students. The research has pointed to benefits of functional knowledge, personal growth, cross-cultural awareness, increased open-mindedness, and the development of soft skills (Fry et al., 2009; Harder et al., 2015; Mapp, 2012). Other research has pointed to growth in intercultural competence (Geyer et al., 2017; Goldstein, 2022; Niehaus & Wegener, 2018; Opengart, 2018) as a result of participation in study abroad.

With the advancement of short-term programs and that over half of all study abroad programs are short term (Mapp, 2012), community colleges need to determine if these programs are impactful. The purpose of this study is to determine if a significant effect could be determined as a result of participation in a short-term program. The findings of this study did find a significant effect in student retention, student completion, and student growth in intercultural competence in a community college setting.

Student Retention

The first research question examined the effect that short term study abroad programs had on student retention. The result of the statistical analysis showed a significant statistical result which meant that the students who participated in a short-term study abroad program were more likely to be retained than the overall student population during the same time period. Since retention is an important topic for community colleges, this finding is important.

The finding does align with the research on retention. In Tinto's (1987) longitudinal model of retention, the college environment and the environment around the student directly affects student retention. In 2005, Tinto further explained that direct interactions between the student and the college is critical for student retention. It stands to reason that a student who participates in a faculty led short term study abroad program would have more interaction with that faculty member and the college. This, according to Tinto's theory, should promote student retention.

Study abroad was highlighted as one of the ten high-impact practices that affect student retention by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007). In another qualitative study, study abroad was again identified as a high-impact practice of retention (Grabsch et al., 2021). In the

above studies, and in Tinto's work, integration is the key to retention. According to previous research literature and the study, short term study abroad has a positive effect on student retention (Xu et al., 2013).

Student Completion

The second research question looked at whether an effect could be determined on a student completion rate because of participation in a short-term study abroad program. After collecting the data and running the test, the study determined that there was a statistically significant result that short term study abroad does have an impact on student completion rates. This means that a student who participates in a short-term study abroad is more likely to stay enrolled and complete their program.

When considering how this result aligns with the literature on student completion, the result of the study fits well. The literature on completion points to student satisfaction and academic integration as major determiners for a student finishing their program (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Short term study abroad is one way to integrate a student into the college.

Vincent Tinto (2005) also wrote about student integration into the college as a determiner for student completion. The goal is to get the students actively involved in the college so that they are more likely to stay and finish their program (Astin, 1984, Kuh et al., 2005, Tinto, 2005). Another determinate of student completion is student engagement into the college and the activities at the college (Kuh et al., 2005). Kuh et al. (2005) specifically pointed to study abroad as an activity that promotes engagement, and that increases retention and completion.

Student Growth in Intercultural Competence

The final research question of this study examined student growth in intercultural competence as a result of participation in a short-term study abroad program using a thematic analysis of survey. Faculty and staff which had led a program at the college were surveyed to determine if they observed student growth as a result of the short-term study abroad program. The descriptive/narrative data determined that the faculty leaders did observe student growth because of the program.

Several of the faculty respondents did comment that growth may have been small due to the short nature of the study abroad program. This aligns with

the research which determined that growth does occur in short term study abroad, even though more growth is observed in long term study abroad (Mapp, 2012). The faculty leaders often commented that more growth in intercultural competence would have been gained in a longer program, but still mentioned that they observed growth.

The narrative data pointed to student learning and growth as a result of the short-term study abroad program. In the study that Opengart (2018) published, student growth in maturity, open-mindedness, adaptability, and appreciation for cultural differences were found. Opengart's research does align with the findings of this study. The literature and this study point to student learning and growth as a result of participation in a short-term study abroad program.

Another theme that was often mentioned was the importance of intentional support for the students in order to foster learning and growth. The faculty and staff that were surveyed mentioned that the class before the study abroad was vital to foster student growth. Also, it was mentioned often that support during the program was needed for students to heighten growth during the program. Niehaus and Wegener (2018) produced a study in which they found that success of a short-term study abroad program could be predicted by the intercultural competence of the faculty member. These findings show that support from a culturally competent leader and intentional learning either through the required class before program or during the program is important to foster student growth in intercultural competence.

Limitations of Findings

A limiting factor of this study and the data is that the number of short-term study abroad participants is low. The correlation of the data to the larger overall student population at the college proved to be difficult. More research should be done to address the issue of why there is such low short-term study abroad participation. The low student participation in the programs is a real problem that colleges should address to determine reasons why this occurs.

Implications for Future Practice

Student retention and completion has been a focus for the college and community colleges as a whole. This study showed a statistical significance to

participation in a short-term study abroad program and improved retention and completion rates. If this is the case, then the college and community colleges as a whole should be looking to promote and expand student participation in a short-term study abroad program.

In both the research literature and the data of this study, the importance of student support was mentioned. The survey results highlighted the importance of the class before the short-term study abroad program. The importance of a quality class which allows the students to learn about the culture in which the students will find themselves in and about intercultural competence in general is of vital importance. Everything must be done to offer a quality class to heighten student learning and growth during the short time in the program country.

A third implication for short term study abroad programs would be that efforts must be made to have student interactions with locals while participating in the short-term study abroad programs. The programming for the short-term study abroad experience should not just be a trip that visits local attractions, but the program should include intentional interaction with the people of the program country. This interaction, which was highlighted in the survey data, is important for student growth in intercultural competence during the program.

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