

Special Section Introduction:

Assessment and Evaluation in Community College/TVET Education Abroad

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An Untapped Resource: Introducing the Special Section on Community College/Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Education Abroad

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Keywords

Assessment, community college, TVET, equity, counter-deficit

Rationale

Community college education abroad has existed for over 60 years and, in the United States, has exhibited the most growth in program offerings of any higher education sector in the past 20 years (Klim, 2020). However, despite this extended history and notable growth over the last decade, investigation into the role that community colleges, and their global equivalents, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, play in the broader realm of education abroad remains limited. With the publication of this special section, we posit that community college education abroad research must claim its role in scholarly discourse and be acknowledged in the field as advancing a new understanding of education abroad for all.

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Much of education abroad research adopts a deficit perspective of the community college/TVET context. A common deficit-focused message is that only universities can advance internationalization (de Wit et al, 2015; Hudzik, 2015) and thus there is a common omission of the community college/TVET sector in the literature. The deficit lens frames low expectations for the community college/TVET sector to offer education abroad, indicating a lack of resources, staff, and support (Boggs & Irwin, 2007). Stereotypes abound about the lack of community college/TVET student interest or ability to enroll in education abroad (Raby, 2019). The barrier narrative perpetuates systemic institutional inequities that marginalize and discriminate against non-traditional student populations (Whatley & Raby, 2020). As we indicate in the final article in this special section, the deficit perspective extends to scholars and practitioners who claim that there is a dearth of literature on community college internationalization, when in fact no such gap in the literature exists.

Current research counters the deficit narrative by capturing student and faculty education abroad leaders' perspectives, which collectively show how the open access philosophy of the community college supports and enables new educational opportunities (Whatley & Raby, 2020). Research also shows the varied learning outcomes available through community college/TVET education abroad that are geared towards adult learners (Wood & Raby, 2022). Still other research debunks the deficit narrative by detailing institutional networks that support various forms of internationalization (Smith, 2019). New research confirms that access to study abroad at community colleges supports all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized (Barone, 2021). In this way, community college education abroad research findings align with and lead a focus on social justice (Viggiano, 2019) and on diversity, equity, and inclusion (Whatley & Raby, 2020).

Contributions of The Special Section

The five articles in this special section add to the expansive body of community college education abroad literature in four primary ways. First, the articles counter the deficit narrative and adopt an anti-deficit approach to examine often marginalized student populations, including students from marginalized racial/ethnic backgrounds, low-income students, first-generation students, students enrolled in technical degree programs, and rural students. These articles highlight the wealth and capabilities that these students have before, during, and after a study abroad experience. They use equity narratives

to show how community college education abroad advances social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Second, these articles advance an understanding of education abroad that supports internationalization efforts in this sector. Each of the articles discusses institutional factors that enable, or have the potential to enable, access, most notably through the lenses of program providers and through the perspectives of institutional leaders. By showing how education abroad thrives in different contexts, new narratives can reshape policies and readdress areas that limit access. Third, these articles highlight the impact that education abroad can have on students' success in college and career. In several studies, study abroad alumni share why they chose to study abroad, barriers that were overcome, how they view their education abroad experience as an opportunity of a lifetime, and how it impacts them today.

A final contribution of the articles in this special section is that they highlight how education abroad exists in the community college/TVET sector not only in the United States but also globally. In fact, the articles share that issues of importance for global TVET institutions are similar to those facing U.S. community colleges. As such, education abroad can, and should be embedded in all community college/TVET institutions with the goal of expanding access to more students. In sum, the articles in this special section challenge inequities through a focus on open access and redefine education abroad as the opportunity of a lifetime for community college/TVET students. Through critical theoretical lenses and approaches that view community college/TVET education abroad from new and diverse perspectives, they advance our understanding of education abroad in this sector.

Special Section Overview

In the first article, Marchionne offers an overview of internationalization in Tunisian Vocational and Educational Training that is based on desk research and interviews with four stakeholders in leadership positions at both the institutional and national governmental levels. This article highlights the importance of internationalization efforts, including the development and support of education abroad programs, in the community college/TVET sector with particular reference to preparation of students to enter a workforce that is increasingly international. Indeed, while the local focus of the community college/TVET sector may at first glance appear to be a deterrent

to international efforts at these institutions, Marchionne points out that if these institutions are to address social and economic inequality in the local communities that they serve, then they must account for the global context that influences local economies in the educational programs that they offer. International mobility, such as through education abroad, is essential for the future success of this sector and its students.

In the second article, Wood introduces an alternative to the deficit perspective that is so pervasive in the community college/TVET education abroad literature in a mixed-methods study focused on one US community college. This study draws attention to several aspects of student identity that are common among students attending this college, namely low-income, first-generation, technical degree program, and rural student status (LIFTR). Regarding participation, this study's results indicate that the provision of education abroad at this institution is especially relevant for students from rural high schools who are more likely to participate than their non-rural counterparts. When exploring the education abroad experiences of students holding at least one LIFTR identity, this study's findings speak to the profound impact that abroad experiences have on these students, who often view their LIFTR identities as assets to their experiences and who express considerable gratitude that their institution offered education abroad opportunities.

The third article in this special section identifies the curriculum as a primary "gatekeeper" to the provision of study abroad opportunities at US community colleges. Rather than ascribing a deficit perspective to community college students or the institutions they attend, Spencer and Wood discuss how study abroad program providers, such as the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), bear responsibility for not offering programs and courses that are designed with community college students' needs in mind. Drawing from interviews with international education leaders at 20 US community colleges, these researchers find that community college international educators would like to work with program providers, especially when it comes to offering longer-term study abroad opportunities. However, the preponderance of upper-division coursework that program providers often offer is a deterrent to community college students, who are typically enrolled in short-term certificate or associate degree programs.

The fourth article in this special section offers a reconsideration of our theoretical understanding of social capital with reference to study abroad outcomes among community college study abroad alumni. While traditional social capital perspectives often focus on what historically minoritized student populations lack, this study turns this perspective on its head to explore how students leverage already-existing social capital resources in the study abroad environment for further development. Specifically, Fischer and Raby use interview data from 27 US community college study abroad alumni to explore how students enhance their already-existing social capital to gain new social capital from their study abroad experiences. Using narrative inquiry, the study's findings indicate that while they were abroad, participants leveraged their social capital resources to further develop empathy, compassion, non-judgement, and open-mindedness through interactions with fellow study abroad participants (bonding social capital). They also developed more general empathy and a deeper cognitive understanding of their host cultures (bridging social capital). Study abroad alumni indicated that these outcomes were especially relevant when they entered the workforce, as they were better able to interact with international colleagues and formed more meaningful relationships with colleagues who had also been abroad.

In the fifth and final article in this special section, we (Raby, Whatley, and Friedman) offer a comprehensive review of the literature on community college/ TVET education abroad. This review demonstrates the longevity and diversity of this body of literature and provides a response to assertions that literature in this area is lacking. The numerous peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters that we identified are testament to the rigor of the work in this area, and the increase in doctoral dissertations on this topic is an exciting indicator of future growth in this literature.

A Call to Tap the Resource

We call on all researchers to acknowledge the body of literature expressed in this special issue and to include it in their future work so that they can make additional and meaningful contributions to what we already know about community college education abroad. This includes those researching the community college/TVET sector and those writing on internationalization who only acknowledge universities. We also call for researchers and practitioners to adopt an active anti-deficit perspective of the community college/TVET sector

when it comes to education abroad. Rather than operating at a deficit, this sector excels in providing meaningful and profound education abroad experiences to marginalized student populations. Instead of marginalizing this sector in conversations around education abroad, we urge researchers and practitioners to consider how community college/TVET education abroad programming can inform similar efforts in other sectors and at other institutions that have had less success in democratizing these programs. The community college/TVET sector is an untapped resource for advancing our understanding of education abroad, and more importantly, the success of marginalized and underrepresented students globally.

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Guest Editor Biography

Melissa Whatley, PhD, is an assistant professor of international and global education at the School for International Training's Graduate Institute. Her research uses quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to improve understanding of policies and practices that impact access and equity in U.S. international education, particularly in the community college context. She is the 2023 recipient of NAFSA's Innovative Research in International Education award.

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Sora H. Friedman, PhD, started working in International Education in 1984, focusing on study abroad, program administration, public diplomacy/advocacy, and training. At SIT, she supports graduate students seeking new professional skills and awareness, and chairs two master's programs. She is a columnist with GlobalEd; current research explores women's leadership. Previously, Sora served in NAFSA regional and national leadership positions, authored *How High the Ceiling: Gender and Leadership in International Higher Education*, and coauthored *Careers in International Education: A Guide for New Professionals*.