Why Don’t More Student Athletes Study Abroad?

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Abstract
This research focused on why student athletes tend to not studying abroad. Student athletes at the University of Wisconsin-Stout were asked to take a survey concerning why had they not gone abroad throughout their time on campus, what were the factors that prohibited them from going abroad, and whether they even wanted to go abroad. This study also looked at how many of those students were male and female, and how many sports they were involved in. Suggestions can be offered on what the international office could do better to make student athletes more aware of the programs offered for students who have a hard time going abroad because of the demands of their sport. The research concluded that there are multiple issues that affect the priority of going abroad such as cost, time, available opportunities, lack of awareness, and major alignment with current offerings for study abroad programs.

Keywords: study abroad, student-athletes, international education

Introduction
Studying abroad has been known for its amazing opportunities and for the positive effect of increasing levels of cultural competence throughout many universities and colleges (Dessoff, 2006). Yet, research has shown that student athletes are a population that has not been pushed enough or possibly made aware enough of their opportunities to go out and see the world through a different lens (Dessoff, 2006). Why is this important? Students may be missing out on opportunities that they are possibly not aware of, and they should have a fair understanding just as well as the students that do know more about studying abroad. There are a number of reasons why student athletes do not go abroad such as cost, time, or unawareness, but this component of a secondary education is rewarding and vital to help students gain more knowledge about the world and other cultures (Dessoff, 2006). Giving student athletes the same opportunities as students who are not in sports is something to strive for if a university goal is to have fairness and inclusion for all.

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Research has shown that a variety of factors play into student athletes list of priorities when it comes to their academics, social, and personal life (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). One of the many challenges today for students on our college campus is leaving their comfort zone in order to explore other things. A lot of student athletes are treated as athletes first and students second, which could dictate their decision not to go abroad (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). This population of students tend to put so much focus into school and sports that they tend to miss out on other social aspects of their college life. With the two curricular and co-curricular activities being their main concentration, they value their athletic participation and believe that it both instills values of independence and enhances particular skills and their overall college experience (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). These are perfect examples of why student athletes do not go abroad enough; however, working with an international office to help accommodate students that desire to go abroad would help make their college life more meaningful and significant.

The research investigated how many student athletes study abroad, what percentage of them are male and female, what is preventing them from going abroad, and if they have been abroad, what term they attended school. The purpose of the survey was to understand the reasons or barriers why there is a lack of student athletes studying abroad compared to the general student population. Data was collected with a survey that asked student athletes to identify the existing barriers to studying abroad. The results of this research will bring more awareness to the international education office on campus so they can make greater efforts to help student athletes to go abroad, whether if it is during the summer, spring, fall, or winter.

**Literature Review**

For years going abroad has been an essential key to help students increase knowledge of other cultures, learn a language, provide opportunities to travel, learn more about themselves, enhance employment opportunities, and overall enhance the value of one’s degree. Studying abroad is a well-known university experience for students that allows them to get exposure of other foreign countries’ institutions (Costello, 2015). A numerous of expected and unexpected lessons are gained when going abroad such as picking up new habits, gaining new views on world issues, experiencing new food, experiencing different weather and environments, and making new friends from different parts of the world. What makes studying abroad interesting is that the United States is not the only country that participates in this global experience; many other countries do as well (e.g. United Kingdom, Pacific
Islands, South America, etc). This bonds majority of the countries together because of the importance of students getting a global experience, gaining cultural competence and being able to apply the skills learned into their daily life and workplace (Costello, 2015).

Going abroad is one of the most life-changing experiences of college and there are many benefits that go along with it. The one thing about studying abroad is that the benefits outweigh the barriers because there is so much that will come out of the experience. One benefit is the likelihood of changing one's opinion about the countries about which one has heard negative things (Costello, 2015). The media does view other countries in a negative light that is not always true, but one thing to remember about studying abroad is that a student's home institution would never send them to a country that is not safe. Another benefit is developing the skill of self-reflection, thereby oneself and discovering things that one probably never knew (Costello, 2015). When being abroad, a great thing a student gets to do is learn more about their own country from the perspective of the host country. Knowing who you are is a big part of shaping your personality. Being away from everything with which the student is familiar and finding him/herself in an environment alone will help bring out a part of themselves that the student has not nourished. According to Costello, living without parents requires hard work and tough decision making and being abroad helps get that experience in adulthood in another country. Costello also states learning languages is another great benefit of going abroad, because it can add a large amount of value to the student's degree and help develop a career that requires a second language. Being bilingual is always a great skill to have in any workplace. Even though there are great benefits to going abroad, there are also barriers that can result in conflict.

Race/Ethnicities/Gender

Going abroad is a great resource for students in regards to seeing the world, but one cannot deny that there are certain groups of people who are traveling to other countries more than other groups. Statistics show that more females tend to go abroad than males. A study shows 191,321 in the year 2003-04 up to 9.6% over the previous year most of the students that went abroad were Caucasian women (Dessoff, 2006). Females outnumbered Caucasian males nearly two-to-one. The lack of male student representation in study abroad programs is possibly rooted from decades of old practices, which could be the reason why more women than men tend to go abroad. One of the possible reasons why more females go abroad goes back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century practices of sending affluent daughters
to finish schooling in countries like Switzerland (Dessoff, 2006). Even though this happened in the past, it is still a fairly common part in today’s college life. From the years 2001 to 2002, nearly two-thirds of study abroad participants were women (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). Even in recent years the shift in students going abroad hasn’t changed; women are still going abroad more than men.

Students of color face many different challenges when going abroad, more or less because of financial strains (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). Also, most first generation students of color come from families that do not value going abroad as much as a middle-class Caucasian family or parents who have college degrees. Why? For students that are first generation and leaving home for the first time, it can be one of the toughest experiences they face alone, and encouraging them to go abroad alone doesn’t make it easier (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). There are multiple reasons why underrepresented students do not go abroad and research show that there are disparities between students of color going abroad counterparts. (Paus & Robinson, 2008).

**Academic Programs/Majors**

Students in any major can go abroad no matter which type of program they are in; there are hundreds of courses out there that are beneficial to students learning in the host country that follow certain academic requirements. Majors and GPAs are big factors that play into a student’s decision to go abroad, depending on the home institution. Each university has their own set of requirements that have to be met for students to have the option to go abroad. A lot of students do feel the pressure when it comes to having a GPA that is suitable to go abroad (Paus & Robinson, 2008). When going abroad and transferring back credits to their home institution, grades are not transferred back, only the credits, which in many cases doesn’t affect a student’s GPA. Their GPA will remain as it was before they went abroad (Peter & Petzold, 2014). Depending on the academic program/major there are certain requirements that student athletes may have to follow in order for their program requirements to be met.

Numerous major programs participate in study abroad, areas such as social science, languages, the arts and humanities, and even mathematics (Paus & Robinson, 2008). Out of various majors, areas of humanities (32.4%) and language (51.9%) report a higher percentage of encouragement for their students to study abroad compared science related majors (25.7%) and social sciences (31.6%) (Paus & Robinson, 2008). Shown through the statistics, science and social science majors may play a part in why student athletes may not study abroad depending.
It is a wonderful experience taking major classes in another country, but most students do worry about passing the courses in their host country. A total percentage of 57% of students do worry about the struggle of fulfilling their major requirements (Doerr, 2014). In addition, a small percentage of students aren’t aware that you can also take general courses like math, sciences, literature, or even gym abroad and still earn college credits to transfer back.

**Student Athletes/Time Commitment**

Student athletes all have different backgrounds and reasons why not to go abroad, but the few similarities that categorize them together is their commitment to their sport and the time and effort they put into becoming better athletes. More or less, they also have the commonality of not going abroad because of their sports, which in some cases could be a good or a bad thing depending on the situation. A lot of the student athletes are treated as athletes first and students second and most times that could dictate their decision to go abroad (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). The group of students in the survey tend to put much of their effort and focus on schoolwork and sports so that they pass up the opportunity to go abroad and experience other cultures. With those two curricular and co-curricular activities as their main concentration, they value their athletic participation and believe that it both instills values of independence of those deprived aspects of college life and enhances particular areas of their overall college experience (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). The vast majority of student athletes have and are still going by these principles within the student population. Student athletes spend majority of their time focusing on school and their sport and do not see studying abroad as an opportunity.

Most student athletes can’t go abroad due to time commitment and loss of positions on teams. Some students do not want to leave because they have financial difficulties, relationships, or even family issues. Student athletes are still normal students as well and often tend to have some of the same problems non-athletic students experience, depending on what type of school the student athlete goes to and/or what type of division their school is ranked in sports (Bell, 2009). Student commitment also varies depending on the division. Schools require more practice and training time to keep their team in good standing, which can affect students going abroad because the student is always training and going to camps to stay in shape for the upcoming season (Bell, 2009). Most student athletes are influenced by their coaches and trainers in the sports field because they are the ones that are guiding them in their athletic career and helping them in any way as possible.
Why Don’t More Student Athletes Study Abroad

With the level of commitment to their schoolwork and sport it may cause a much heavier load of responsibility for student athletes, which can restrict them from going abroad.

In addition, losing team positions was a common concern for student athletes in this survey, and one of the biggest reasons why they didn’t want to leave their team temporarily to go abroad. Research shows students work hard for years to make it into positions that they possibly dreamed of, and going abroad would take that position away from that student because it cannot be held unfilled or inactive while they are away (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). On the other hand, depending on the host country, there are possible opportunities for student athletes to play intramural sports. Student athletes can spend up to 20-30 hours a week with their team training and practicing, dedicating so much time and effort to something like sports and to go abroad and lose what they work hard for can be a tough decision to make. They have become a family with their teams and have become more in tune with the sport. Giving all that up for a semester or year in another country is not much of a priority for student athletes (Bell, 2009). Giving student athletes the choice to go abroad is the main issue that is not happening on most college campuses. Letting them know about the opportunities and giving students a chance to pick for themselves would be much more beneficial than them not knowing what type of opportunities they could have by going abroad. Overall the way sports are structured makes it difficult for student athletes to decide whether to go abroad or stick to their sport because they may not maintain their rank/position.

Socioeconomic Background

A student’s financial background does play a great deal into them going abroad. Each student comes from a different background in general, but most minority students tend to face financial difficulties because of possibly being first generation and coming from low-income or single-parent households (Dessoff, 2006). This population of students has to search for more funds for their trip if they aren’t offered enough in financial aid to cover the full cost of going abroad. What most students do not know is that their financial aid in general can help pay for their trip abroad. Depending on the host school and the location of the school, it may be that financial aid is enough to cover the whole cost of the trip (Anderson & Lawton, 2011). In general, not all countries have expensive tuition.

One thing that could also help students to not spend much money on going abroad would be considering short-term study abroad programs. The short-term study abroad trips are mainly led by faculty that are current
professors at the student’s home institution. This is also is a great benefit because the trip is typically related to the student’s area of study and what the professor teaches (Loh & Steagall, 2011). This type of program is an option that students with financial hardship could possibly look into, if going abroad for a semester or year is too much for them to afford. Short term programs can range anywhere between $300-3500 depending on the country (Loh & Steagall, 2011). Also, there are grants and scholarships that students can apply for that can cover their tuition. This takes the pressure off students who are searching for these funds to go abroad. International Education offices on college campuses would be a great source to find all the information needed for looking for grants and scholarships.

Seeking out the resources around their campus would be a big factor if the students are not feeling competent enough to look alone. Talking to students who have already been abroad can be beneficial to students seeking a study abroad experience because the former students have already gone through the process of being abroad. Drawing on the insights of seasoned travelers may help prospective students to get where they want to be in their process (Dessoff, 2006). Financial stress can be a burden for most college students and effect their chances of going abroad.

**Methodology**

**Overview**

A number of student athletes at the University of Wisconsin-Stout were sent a survey of questions regarding their experience with studying abroad or asking if they have ever studied abroad. The survey was composed of nine questions that were simple and straightforward. The questions are listed below:

1. What is your gender?
2. What year are you?
3. What is your undergraduate major?
4. Do you participate in any intercollegiate sport?
5. If yes, which sport?
6. Have you ever studied abroad at UW-Stout?
7. If yes, when?
8. If not, what prevented you from studying abroad?
9. If other, what was the reason(s)?
Participation

Planning, Assessment, Research & Quality (PARQ) services office at the UW-Stout campus was utilized for this research. The survey was sent out to 250 student athletes randomly, and 30% of the student athletes responded. This survey specifically focused on student athletes and the survey was kept anonymous.

Materials

Qualtrics survey software was used to send out the emails to the student athletes on campus. PARQ was utilized to get the emails of the students athletes here on campus.

Procedure

At the beginning of the process, a hypothesis was developed in relation to UW-Stout student athletes and created a survey of questions asking about study abroad experience. A survey was created through Qualtrics software to submit with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. The materials were sent in early March and received approval two weeks later. The PARQ office on campus was contacted to request 250 student athlete participants to send the survey to. The survey was distributed to those students through Qualtrics survey software. After all the responses were in, the results were analyzed through Qualtrics and the final results were looked at in mid-May.

Results/Discussion

The data collected were analyzed to find out the reasons why student athletes do not take part in study abroad opportunities on campus. The data was collected via a survey administered through Qualtrics. Information on a student’s gender, major, and year in school was collected and the survey was administered to an equal amount of female and male students.

41 male student athletes responded to the survey, 48.24% of the total number of respondents; and a total of 44 female student athletes responded to the survey, 51.76% of the total.
Figure 1 shows the amount of male and female student athletes that responded to the survey. The breakdown of genders was close to 50% male and female with a 3% difference. Fact that there are more females than males that have taken this survey drew attention to how many of these females and males have been abroad.
Figure 2 shows the amount of student athletes by year in college. A total of 23 respondents were freshmen (27.06%) and 25 respondents were sophomores (29.41%). A total of 18 student athletes who were juniors (21.18%) responded and 19 student athletes who were seniors (22.35%). The data shows as the students moved from freshmen's to seniors the number of students interested in studying abroad started to decrease, possibly because the amount of dedication to their studies increased the longer students spent in college. From the pie chart it seems that freshmen and sophomores were a lot more responsive; they had more interest than the upper classmen did. There is a possibility that the under classmen may have had more dedication to study abroad than upper classmen because of the more demanding roles and classes they take on as juniors and seniors. Excelling in their individual sports may require more time and dedication, especially if they want to hold their positions in their sport. There are a numerous of possibilities that do confine student athletes to their sport and academics. Even though each student is different and probably has different reasons for not studying abroad, just letting them know that there are opportunities there for them if or whenever they choose to go abroad opens up the possibilities for them.
Figure 3: Participants Academic Majors
The literature sources showed that majority of the students that are studying abroad were majors that are considered social science, mathematics and humanities (Paus & Robinson, 2008). Not too many students were in art or design classes because those types of majors required more time spent outside of class doing drawings, art, etc. Additionally, practices and training may complicate the students involvement in sports and may compromise their positions.

![Figure 4: Percentage of Participants in Intercollegiate Sport on Campus](image)

Out of 84 respondents there was a total of 83 student athletes (98.81%) who stated they were in an intercollegiate sport on the UW-Stout campus. Even though all respondents selected were athletes one student athlete (1.19%) said no to being involved because of possibly leaving their sport. This was to be expected from each student because the survey was only sent to student athletes.
Figure 5: Breakdown of Sports Participants were involved in
This pie chart shows the number of sports that UW-Stout offers and the number of student athletes in those sports. The data also shown that the three top sports that most students are part of is track and field, football, and basketball.

Figure 6: Percentage of Athletes that have Studied Abroad
This pie chart shows the amount of students that have not been abroad and the ones that have been abroad. A total of 74 student athletes (87.06%) responded not having been abroad. A total of 11 student athletes (12.94%) responded that they had been abroad. The majority of the student athletes said they had not gone abroad because they spend so much time in
their sport that they feel that they do not need to go abroad. They put more of their effort and focus on school work and their sport and did not plan to incorporate going abroad into their plan (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). Out of the many reasons why student athletes do not go abroad, time has been one of the largest responses. For the athletes, it seems that time is their ultimate challenge. Finding ways to stay dedicated to their sport and academics at the same time as trying to go abroad is a problem. Seeing going abroad as a priority doesn't guarantee that the students aren’t interested; they possibly haven’t found a concrete plan to balance everything without risking anything. There is also a chance that most student athletes do not understand or aware of the great benefits of going abroad. For example, learning about new cultures, languages, or experiencing new ideas. Student athletes could take what they have learned abroad and bring it back to possibly teach their teams or classmates new things that could maybe change their lives.

Figure 7: Time of Year Athletes Studied Abroad
This pie chart shows a total of 1 student athlete (8.33%) who responded that s/he did a fall term abroad. A total of 0 student athletes responded to not going abroad in the winter, although this could be a good time to go abroad. A total of 3 student athletes (25.0%) responded that they went abroad during the spring term. A total of 8 student athletes (66.67%) responded that they went abroad during the summer.

For the student athletes who did go abroad most of them implied that the best time for a student athlete to go abroad was in the summer time, but also during winter break as well. It was expected these two terms would be
the most accommodating, simply because they are both during times when the campus is closed and classes are out of session. It would make more sense for students to take advantage of these two terms.

Figure 8: Reasons for Athletes Not Studying Abroad

The research that was found had a total of 33 student athletes (32.67%) responded that cost prevented them from going abroad. A total of 8 student athletes (7.92%) responded that the programs do not align with their major. A total of 12 student athletes (11.88%) responded that they were not interested in the study abroad locations offered. A total of 10 student athletes (9.90%) responded that they were not aware of the studying abroad opportunities. A total of 38 student athletes (37.62%) responded with other.

From the data on the pie chart, the two biggest issues that student athletes seem to face are cost and the programs not aligning with students' majors. This research on the topic of going abroad, indicates that cost has always been students' most difficult barrier. Depending on what school and location they go to, the study may be affordable when financial aid can cover it (Dessoff, 2006). Cost tends to be an obstacle for most students. Some athletes may see the value of going abroad despite the cost and some may believe that since it is expensive the option of going abroad is not much of a priority to them. Making sure that they are aware of all of their financial aid options when looking into going abroad could help broaden the opportunities.
In this last question, students had to give a response to why they did not go abroad or reasons why they did not go. After analyzing all the responses, the results showed six different themes that represented all of the answers that the student athletes have given.

In this table showed the least common answers that some students had, which were all valid in their cases. The most common one was being too busy because of sport demands and academics and this confirms the existing literature.

**Table 1: Other reasons for not Studying Abroad**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Total of student responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Miss their sport</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sport goes through both semesters</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Not interested in going abroad period</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Too busy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Workout/prep for upcoming season</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Plan to go abroad in future</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In this table showed the least common answers that some students had, which were all valid in their cases. The most common one was being too busy because of sport demands and academics and this confirms the existing literature.

**Conclusion**

This study shows student athletes on college campuses deal with barriers when it comes to studying abroad. Also, within the student athlete population, underrepresented students of color have greater disparities when it comes to studying abroad. Due to limited research on student athletes studying abroad, further research needs to be done on this topic. Future research should survey larger universities and colleges to see if there are any new challenges and obstacles that student athletes face when studying abroad. This study was conducted at a small university which may result in different challenges. The research can go beyond just student athletes, it can be applied to students of color, students that identify as LGBTQ, or students with disabilities. All these underrepresented groups have similar problems when it comes to going abroad because of the lack of support for them. We can find new and efficient ways to help these students go abroad starting with getting more supporters and people to help spread the word about the opportunities there are out there. Developing some programs geared towards
helping student athletes go abroad could be a huge step in changing the
dynamics in population on who is going abroad. The options are endless and
accommodating.
References


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