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## The Impact of Study Abroad as it Relates to Business Students' Career Paths

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Intended date of commencement May 2022

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Certified by \_\_\_\_\_  
Director, Honors Program Date

**THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD AS IT RELATES TO BUSINESS STUDENTS'  
CAREER PATHS**

**Madison M. Burgett**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the honors degree  
at Butler University**

**Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Lawrence J. Lad**

**May 2022**

**Table of Contents**

Abstract	4
Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
Cultural Competence	5
Soft Skills	6
Self-Perceptions	6
Professional Lives	7
Business Value of Study Abroad	8
Gap in Literature	9
Hypotheses	9
Methods	10
Results	13
Hypothesis 1	13
Hypothesis 2	14
Hypothesis 3	14
Hypothesis 4	15
Hypothesis 5	16
Discussion	17
Hypothesis 1	17
Hypothesis 2	18
Hypothesis 3	18
Hypotheses 4 & 5	19
Overall Discussion	19
Conclusion	19
References	21
Appendix	23
Figure 1	23
Figure 2	25
Figure 3	27
Figure 4	28
Figure 5	28

## **Abstract**

Business schools in the United States are continuously working to provide students with real-world experiences which will help them discern, and prepare for, their future careers. As globalization continues to increase the interconnectedness of the world, and of the companies within it, it is increasingly important that business students are globally aware and culturally competent. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that studying abroad enables business students to discern and prepare for their future careers. To demonstrate this, students and graduates of Butler University's Lacy School of Business, with graduation years between 2012 and 2022, were surveyed. Those who previously studied abroad were part of the experimental group, and those who did not study abroad were part of the control group. It was found that business students who studied abroad are more likely to work internationally, more prepared for the workforce and more confident in their ability to obtain jobs, and more comfortable networking with colleagues in the business world than business students who did not study abroad. These findings emphasize the importance that business schools should be placing on their students' study abroad experiences.

## **Introduction**

As university students worldwide plan their study abroad experiences, many are constantly critiqued for taking a "vacation" in the middle of their collegiate careers. Comments such as, "College sure is easier now than it was back in my day," and "Vacationing in Europe never would have counted as college when I went to school," are regularly directed at study abroad participants. What the commenters fail to understand is the critical importance of international experiences, particularly in today's interconnected world. The purpose of this study is to alter the interpretation of study abroad by displaying the impact of study abroad, particularly as it relates to business students' career paths.

Business students were chosen to be studied in isolation because of the growing emphasis that businesses place on hiring students with international experiences. As quoted by Burgos, "The word 'international' is essential to how the world of business operates today (Armesto, 2021)." Not only has globalization led companies to internationalize over the following decades, but the Covid-19 pandemic has led companies to begin hiring talent from all over the world. Therefore, all employees need to be culturally competent in order to effectively work on these global teams. Although these global teams are made up of more than just business majors, a prominent push for international experiences has occurred in the business schools. Armesto (2021) describes how, over the past few years, MBA programs have begun mandating international experiences in students' curriculum. Therefore, it is particularly pertinent in today's world to specifically focus on the impact that studying abroad has on business students' career paths.

While the subject of study abroad, and the impact that it has on students, has been well-researched, there is a gaping hole in major-specific research. Generally, when researchers study the impact of study abroad, they simply group all students together. The following literature review discusses much of the existing research regarding studying abroad, including cultural competence and soft skills gained while studying abroad, the impact that study abroad has on students' self-perceptions and professional lives, and the value that past study abroad participants bring to companies. However, very little of the discussed literature focuses on

studies that have divided students up by their college majors because that research is nearly nonexistent.

While nearly nonexistent, there is one researcher, Tammy Orahood, who studies specifically business students' study abroad experiences. Her research will be further discussed in both the "Literature Review" and the "Gap in Literature" sections. However, Orahood's research focuses heavily on the cultural competencies that business students gain while studying abroad (Orahood et al., 2004). This study, on the other hand, will specifically examine the career path of business students and graduates.

## **Literature Review**

As briefly mentioned, research regarding the impact of studying abroad is not a new concept. Historically, most research has been based around the impact of learning a foreign language, but as times have progressed, researchers have begun examining the overall impact of studying abroad (Cisneros-Donahue et al., 2012). Much of the existing research details the cultural competence, soft skills, and self-confidence that studying abroad helps students to develop. There is also some existing research regarding the impact that studying abroad has on students' professional lives, as well as the business value of hiring students who have studied abroad. While this research is detailed below, note that none of the studies focus specifically on the career impact of studying abroad as it relates specifically to business students, an issue which will be further discussed in the "Gap in Literature" section.

### Cultural Competence

The majority of research regarding the impact of studying abroad encompasses a discussion of the cultural competence that students gain. The five building blocks of cultural competence are cultural skills, cultural knowledge, an open attitude, self-awareness, and awareness of others (Cook Ross Inc., 2020). The below paragraphs describe research which has proven that studying abroad helps students develop within these aspects of cultural competence.

Relating to the building block of having an open attitude, Heffron and Maresco (2014) found that students who study abroad are significantly more likely to appreciate cultural differences than those who do not study abroad. The article notes that, after studying abroad, students develop more tolerance for frustrating situations as a result of language barriers. Similarly, it states that those who have studied abroad are more willing to communicate in a foreign language and they consider themselves more patient with people who do not speak English well.

Maharaja (2018) conducted qualitative research involving 150 undergraduate students who previously participated in a semester-long study abroad experience. Her primary finding was that studying abroad has a positive impact on students' intercultural competence and personal development. When further investigating why that positive impact exists, the primary theme revolves around the idea that studying abroad allows students to gain a better understanding of their own culture, as well as other cultures, and a new appreciation for cultural differences (Maharaja, 2018). This research goes to show that studying abroad increases cultural knowledge while also helping students develop open attitudes.

Three similar articles all made the case that studying abroad leads students to develop cultural skills. Stone and Petrick (2013) conducted a survey of over 6,000 study abroad alumni asking which collegiate experiences had a strong impact on the alumni, and study abroad was mentioned more than any other experience. Data analysis also revealed that these students gained cultural skills, as well as intellectual and cognitive knowledge growth, while abroad (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Similarly, a study by Ingraham and Peterson, conducted at Michigan State University, found that when students study abroad, they gain cultural skills such as understanding and adapting to the cultures they are in (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Additionally, it was found that study abroad participants experience an increase in foreign language acquisition and intercultural communication abilities (Mozeleski, 2013).

Regarding overall cultural competencies, rather than its individual building blocks, it was found that studying abroad increases students' global and intercultural competencies in the areas of "understanding the complexities of global issues, applying disciplinary knowledge in a global context, having linguistic and cultural competency in at least one language other than their own, working with people from other cultures, and working comfortably with people from other cultures (Stebleton et al., 2013)."

### Soft Skills

In addition to finding that studying abroad helps students develop cultural competencies, research has found that studying abroad contributes to students' development of soft skills. For example, while examining how studying abroad contributes to the process of academically-oriented maturation, Hadis (2005) found that decision-making skills, independence, and open-mindedness tend to improve when students study abroad. Similarly, Cisneros-Donahue et al. (2012) conducted research which analyzed students both before and after their experiences abroad. The results led the researchers to believe that studying abroad enhanced patience, flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and gave students an improved perception of world geography and the interdependence of countries (Cisneros-Donahue et al., 2012).

### Self-Perceptions

Another benefit of studying abroad, which research has made evidently clear, is how it affects students' perceptions of themselves. Research has shown that studying abroad often leads students to develop higher self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.

In a pretest-posttest study, by Braskamp et al. (2009), a statistically significant number of students changed their responses, after studying abroad, regarding their sense of self. The primary finding was that education abroad helps foster healthy self-images and self-confidence (Braskamp et al., 2009). This finding, that studying abroad improves students' self-confidence, was reiterated in a survey of over 6,000 study abroad alumni (Stone & Petrick, 2013) and in a study conducted at Michigan State University (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004).

In addition to improving self-confidence, studying abroad has been shown to improve students' self-efficacy, particularly as it relates to students' abilities to speak foreign languages. It was

found that the exact extent of self-efficacy gains was associated with the types of interactions that students had with individuals in the foreign countries (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012).

Similarly, overall self-esteem has been found to be boosted as a result of studying abroad. Exact attitude changes were found to have been partially based on variables such as enjoyment of the experience and contact with non-Americans (Hensley & Sell, 1979).

### Professional Lives

While the aforementioned articles made significant strides in demonstrating the benefits of studying abroad, they primarily focus on the cultural knowledge and self-growth gained through the experience. They fail to recognize the career-related impact of studying abroad. Relative to the research regarding cultural knowledge and self-growth, research regarding the career-related impact is significantly lacking. However, a few studies, as described below, have worked towards identifying ways in which students' professional lives are impacted by studying abroad.

One of the primary findings as to how studying abroad has impacted students' careers is that the experiences abroad often impact the students' later career choice. In a study by Franklin (2010), 42% of participants noted that their study abroad experiences influenced their career choice. Additionally, 73% of study abroad alumni from the study have a career that involves either an international or a multicultural dimension (Franklin, 2010). In another similar study, nearly two thirds of survey respondents noted that studying abroad affected their career choices, and half of the respondents ended up in careers with some sort of global aspect (Norris & Gillespie, 2009). Yet another study found that 96% of survey respondents who had studied abroad claimed that the experience impacted their career paths. The same study found that 83% of study abroad participants were interested in working overseas while only 51% of non-study abroad participants were interested (Orahod et al., 2004).

In addition to impacting their choice of career, research has demonstrated that studying abroad makes graduates more capable of being hired for their preferred jobs. In one study, 73% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their study abroad experiences made them more competitive in the job market (Franklin, 2010). Another report noted that 78% of past study abroad participants surveyed stated that they have discussed their study abroad experiences during an interview. Of the same group, more than half believed that their study abroad experience contributed to a job offer at some point (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017).

According to graduates, their increased likelihood of being hired is for good reason. In Franklin's (2010) study, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that they apply their intercultural competency, gained from studying abroad, to their professional lives. Similarly, out of a group of the past study abroad participants that completed an internship or field experience while abroad, the majority claimed that the international experience assisted them in their careers in some way (Norris & Gillespie, 2009). In another study, past study abroad participants frequently attested to how studying abroad improved their abilities to work with clients and colleagues from different backgrounds, as well as different countries (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017).



### Business Value of Study Abroad

Although the articles in the above section examine the career impact of studying abroad, they only consider the impact it has on the “typical” students’ careers, meaning that the students’ majors are not factored in. This is a detrimental factor to exclude from the research because study abroad experiences are often tailored based on students’ majors. For example, an education major’s study abroad experience may consist of living with a host family and volunteering to teach English to elementary students. On the other hand, a business major’s study abroad experience may consist of an internship with a local business and a few courses related to their major. While the experience of studying abroad has proven beneficial to all students, the particular benefits that students should reap are different based on their majors. The below paragraphs detail research explaining the value that companies gain from hiring students that have studied abroad.

The primary reason that businesses prefer to hire students who have studied abroad is because those students are more capable of operating in culturally-diverse contexts, as demonstrated in the “Cultural Competence” section. As a result of globalization and the world’s increasing interdependence, today’s employees are often expected to successfully interact with individuals across the globe. In fact, more than a quarter of U.S. employers reported that their employees frequently engage with customers and partners overseas. It is critical that those employees possess intercultural skills in order to bring in new clients, work with diverse teams, and support a good reputation for the company (British Council, 2013).

When considering which experiences employers value most, it is said that the value the employers place on international experiences depends on four factors; relevance to the employers’ activities, the nature of the work completed by a student in an internship, the reputation of the organization the student worked with, and whether the international experience was aligned with an assessment (Crossman & Clarke, 2009). Historically, as graduates of U.S. business schools have neglected to engage in these experiences abroad, businesses have looked to hire international students (Orahod et al., 2004). Assuming that U.S. business schools begin preparing their students to operate in culturally diverse contexts, career opportunities will be wide open, as the demand for cross-culturally competent employees is continuously increasing as a result of globalization (Crossman & Clarke, 2009).

In addition to valuing the cross-cultural competence of students who have studied abroad, employers also value other skills and knowledge that students gain while abroad. For example, one study of one hundred HR employees found that they consider interpersonal skills to be the most important qualification for a potential job candidate. The same study found that the HR employees also believe that students that studied abroad are more likely to possess strong interpersonal skills (Orahod et al., 2004). Similarly, another study found that students who have had international experiences, such as study abroad, are more employable because of their cultural sensitivity, personal and professional development, and development of soft skills (Crossman & Clarke, 2009).

The overall importance of businesses hiring students who have studied abroad was well-summed up in a quote by Laurette Bennhold-Samaan. She stated, “In today’s global economy, where

complexity and change are the norm, attracting and retaining culturally competent talent will continue to be a challenge for companies. International experience has become a critical asset for all global organizations and will continue to create a competitive advantage—both for the individuals and for the companies that hire them.” This particular quote highlighted the need for four-year institutions to be re-shaped in a way that will foster opportunities to gain practical experience related to the global workforce (Anderson et al., 2015).

### **Gap in Literature**

As demonstrated in the literature review, there is an overwhelming amount of research displaying the ideas that studying abroad increases students’ cultural competencies and makes them more marketable to potential employers. However, this research simply lumps all students into one category, rather than examining students based on their major and on their goals of the study abroad experience. Whereas a Spanish major may study abroad to practice language skills, a pharmacy major may study abroad to examine other countries’ healthcare systems. On the other hand, a business major is likely going to study abroad to gain international work experience because employers value graduates with international experiences and career development is the core of many business schools.

Since students in every major have differing goals, experiences are going to impact different majors in different ways. Unfortunately, much of the research regarding studying abroad does not factor this concept into the research. Tammy Orahood is the only researcher who has published work regarding the impact of studying abroad specifically as it relates to business students. However, her article still follows the general trend of examining how business students gained cultural competency while abroad which, in turn, made them more marketable to employers. It fails to acknowledge whether students who have studied abroad are more interested in working internationally, more confident in the workplace, more comfortable with networking, and more likely to earn quick promotions and high starting salaries.

To help fill the gap in research, this study examines how studying abroad impacts the career paths of business students and graduates. Studying business students in isolation is important because of the focus that business schools place on career development. For example, Butler University emphasizes the importance of career development so strongly that it assigns a career mentor to each student in the Lacy School of Business. Being that career development is so important to business schools, it is of utmost importance that business schools discover additional ways to advance students’ career development. Therefore, if it is found that studying abroad significantly impacts business students’ career paths, universities should be placing additional emphasis on the importance of international experiences to their business students.

### **Hypotheses**

Although “career path” is a very broad term, this study focuses primarily on five different aspects of business students’ career paths. The five associated hypotheses are elaborated on below.

1. Business students who studied abroad will be more interested in working internationally-based jobs than students who did not study abroad.

This hypothesis is largely based on studies by Heffron & Maresco (2014), Stebleton et al. (2013), and Maharaja (2018), which demonstrated that students were more inclined to work in international careers after studying abroad. This study will determine if this is accurate for solely business students, as it was for students of all majors. The study will consider jobs that are internationally-based but can be worked remotely from the United States, as well as jobs that would require the student to move overseas post-graduation.

2. Business students who studied abroad will feel more confident in their ability to obtain jobs and will feel more prepared to enter the workforce than students who did not study abroad.

This hypothesis will be largely focused on how confident students feel regarding their abilities in the business workforce. The literature review acknowledged that students' self-confidence and self-esteem generally increases as a result of studying abroad. Therefore, the expectation is that the overall self-confidence will also make past study abroad participants more confident in their abilities in the workplace.

3. Business students who studied abroad will be more comfortable networking with business colleagues than students who did not study abroad.

While this hypothesis will examine how comfortable students are networking with colleagues in the business world, it will factor in both how comfortable students claim to be, as well as their previous networking actions. The expectation that students who studied abroad will be more comfortable networkers is primarily based on the aforementioned research that shows they possess increased self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem after studying abroad.

4. Business students who studied abroad will be promoted faster than those who did not study abroad.

Research such as that of Crossman & Clarke (2009) demonstrated that employers see significant value in hiring students with international experience. Franklin's study supported the idea that graduates regularly employ skills from their experiences abroad in their professional careers (2010). Being that employers believe graduates with certain skills are more capable, and the graduates are using those certain skills, it is reasonable to expect that those graduates will perform better and thereby will be promoted faster. Within the research, the rate at which employees are promoted will be measured based on a bracket system.

5. Business students who studied abroad will receive higher starting salaries than those who did not study abroad.

Similar to the fourth hypothesis, this hypothesis is largely based on the research that demonstrates the value that employers place on graduates who have had international experiences (Crossman & Clarke, 2009). Assuming that the employers are more inclined to hire students with international experiences, it can also be reasonably expected that they would be

more inclined to start them out at a higher pay. Also similar to the fourth hypothesis, within the research, the starting salaries will be measured based on a bracket system.

## Methods

All research within this study was conducted through students and graduates of Butler University. More specifically, the target population was current students and alumni of the Lacy School of Business who have graduation years between 2012 and 2022. This target population was further broken down into two groups from which the sample was taken. The first group, the experimental group, consisted of students and alumni who studied abroad while in the Lacy School of Business. The second group, the control group, consisted of students and alumni who did not study abroad while in the Lacy of School Business. Samples of fifty were taken from both the experimental and control groups.

Regarding the experimental group, there was no set requirement for how long the students had to have studied abroad for. This lack of requirement was based on two different studies, which essentially both found that students do not need to spend an entire semester abroad to reap the benefits of the experience. The first study, conducted at Murray State University, found that there was no statistically significant correlation between the length of study abroad experiences and cultural adaptation of students while abroad (Mozeleski, 2013). The second study found that significant change in individuals' global citizenship was shown after only four weeks abroad. This finding leads to the belief that short-term study abroad programs are capable of bringing about transformative learning, just as semester-long study abroad programs are (Tarrant et al., 2014). Because of these studies, the experimental group includes students who studied abroad for lengths varying from a few weeks to an entire year.

To contact the target population for the experimental group, Butler University faculty members, including Calie Dickey and Dr. Bill Templeton, were involved. Calie Dickey serves as the Associate Director of Study Abroad in Butler's Center for Global Education and therefore was able to send out a survey to the target population for the experimental group. This survey was sent on October 18, 2021. Dr. Bill Templeton, the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs in the Lacy School of Business, leads an annual study abroad trip to London. Therefore, he was able to send out a survey to students who he previously accompanied to London and who fall within the experimental group's target population. This survey was sent on October 26, 2021. The fifty responses which were chosen as the sample were simply the first fifty responses received. The sixteen survey questions, which all fifty sample respondents answered, can be viewed in figure one of the appendix.

To contact the target population for the control group, the staff of Butler University's Registration and Records provided assistance. After the research was approved by Butler's Institutional Review Board, Registration and Records provided the names and emails of current students and alumni of the Lacy School of Business with graduation years between 2012 and 2022, and the survey was sent to those email addresses. After receiving over two hundred and fifty responses, the fifty chosen for the sample were strategically selected based on their graduation years. The table below shows the graduation years of the fifty sample respondents from the experimental group.

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
2012	2
2013	1
2014	4
2015	3
2016	5
2017	7
2018	4
2019	9
2020	7
2021	6
2022	2

To ensure that no differences in findings could simply be a result of different ages being studied between the experimental and control groups, the control group sample was chosen to strategically match the graduation years of the experimental group. The control group survey received over 250 responses, so there was no shortage of responses. In the instance that more than the needed number of respondents had a certain graduation year, the first responses were chosen to be a part of the sample. For example, since the experimental group contained two responses from 2012 graduates, the first two 2012 graduates that completed the control group survey were chosen as part of the sample.

While many of the questions that were asked in the experimental group's survey were also asked in the control group's survey, exact questions asked of the control group can be viewed in figure two of the appendix. Notice that the control group survey includes the question, "Did you study abroad?" Registration and Records was unable to filter the list of names and emails by whether the students previously studied abroad. Therefore, to ensure that control group participants did not study abroad, any respondents who answered "Yes" to "Did you study abroad?" were automatically prompted to submit their surveys. Those responses were all immediately filtered out of the survey responses before choosing the sample.

After selecting samples from both the experimental and control groups, data analysis began. The first step was simply to outline the sample responses from the experimental and control groups in two different Excel worksheets. When analyzing the majority of the quantitative data, Excel's data analysis tools were used to conduct one-tailed T-tests with an alpha of 0.05.

## Results

The summarized quantitative responses from the survey questions can be seen in figures three, four, and five in the appendix. Figure three displays overall responses from a variety of survey questions whereas figures four and five each display responses from an individual survey question. The below sections expand upon the survey responses, particularly as they pertain to each of the five aforementioned hypotheses.

### Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis expects that business students who studied abroad will be more interested in working internationally-based jobs than students who did not study abroad. This hypothesis was tested using the four below survey questions.

1. On a scale of 1-7, how likely would you be to take a job that required you to move to a different country?
2. On a scale of 1-7, how likely would you be to take a virtual job that was based out of another country, but allowed you to live in the U.S.?
3. What career did you want to pursue when you started college?
4. What career do/did you want to pursue after graduation?

The first survey question, shown above, led to very different responses from the experimental and control groups. On a scale of 1 to 7, 7 being very likely to move countries for a job, the mean response from the experimental group was 4.8. Alternatively, the mean response from the control group was only 2.58. Being that the P-value of this data set was 2.347E-08, which is far less than the 0.05 alpha, the data was statistically significant. It can be concluded that business students who study abroad will be more interested in a job that requires them to move to a different country than business students who do not study abroad.

The second survey question, on the other hand, did not produce statistically significant results. The control group averaged a mean response of 4.52 while the experimental group had a mean response of 4.62. These average responses demonstrate that the sample students who studied abroad were slightly more likely to take an internationally-based job that allowed them to work remotely from the United States. However, there was not enough of a difference to be statistically significant because the P-value was 0.392.

Survey questions three and four worked simultaneously to examine if students are more inclined to work internationally after studying abroad. When the control group was asked what career they wished to pursue when they first started college, no responses regarded careers with international focuses. Similarly, when the control group was asked what career they ended up pursuing (or now wish to pursue, in the case that they are still in college), no responses regarded careers with international focuses. On the other hand, when the experimental group was asked what career they wished to pursue when they first started college, one respondent noted a career with an international focus. When the same respondents noted what careers they wanted to pursue, or ended up pursuing, after studying abroad, three respondents noted careers with

international focuses. This change in the experimental group's responses demonstrates that studying abroad correlates with an increased desire to work an internationally-focused job.

### Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis anticipates that past study abroad participants will be more confident in their abilities to join and be successful in the business workplace than those who did not study abroad. This hypothesis was tested by three survey questions, as shown below.

1. On a scale of 1-7, how prepared did/do you feel to work in the business world right after graduation?
2. On a scale of 1-7, how confident were you that you will/would have a job right after graduation?
3. On a scale of 1-7, how confident are/were you that you will/would secure your 2 Butler-required internships?

All three of the above survey questions were analyzed using one-tailed T-tests with an alpha of 0.05. Results from the first survey question, regarding feelings of post-graduate preparedness, showed that there was a statistically significant difference between responses from the experimental and control groups. The mean response from the experimental group was 5.8 while the mean response from the control group was 5.34. The P-value of the data set was 0.023, and being that it is less than 0.05, the responses demonstrate that those who studied abroad felt more prepared to enter the business world right after graduation than those who did not study abroad.

The second survey question, regarding students' confidence in obtaining a job right after graduation, delivered an experimental group mean of 5.96 and a control group mean of 5.44. As with the first survey question, these results were also statistically significant because the P-value was 0.032. This demonstrates that respondents who studied abroad felt more confident that they would have a job right after graduation than respondents who did not study abroad.

The third survey question pertains to a requirement specific to Butler University. All students who graduate with a degree from Butler's Lacy School of Business are required to complete two internships prior to graduation. While it was hypothesized that students who studied abroad would be more confident in their ability to secure these two internships, the results were not statistically significant. The mean response of the experimental group was 6.08, and the mean response of the control group was 5.96. Although the mean was slightly higher for the experimental group, the P-value was 0.306, so it cannot be concluded that respondents who studied abroad felt more confident in their ability to secure two Butler-required internships than respondents who did not study abroad.

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis focuses on comfortability with networking and expects that those who studied abroad will be more comfortable than those who did not. This hypothesis was tested by

the two below survey questions, one of which considers how comfortable respondents claim to be while the other considers their previous networking actions.

1. On a scale of 1-7, how comfortable are you networking with colleagues in the business world?
2. Have you ever reached out to a stranger on LinkedIn for your professional benefit?

When asked about their comfortability of networking with colleagues in the business world, the data clearly displayed that the experimental group was more comfortable than the control group. The mean comfortability, on a scale of 1 to 7, of the experimental group was 5.94 while the mean of the control group was 5.02. The P-value of the one-tailed T-test was 0.0007, and being that it was smaller than the alpha of 0.05, the results are statistically significant.

Regarding the second survey question, respondents answered with either “Yes” or “No.” It was hypothesized that respondents who studied abroad would be more comfortable networking and therefore would have reached out to strangers more often than respondents who did not study abroad. The data supported this hypothesis, as 68% of the experimental group answered “Yes,” they have previously reached out to a stranger on LinkedIn while only 50% of respondents answered “Yes.”

#### Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis expects that respondents who studied abroad will be promoted faster than those who did not study abroad. This was solely tested by the below survey question.

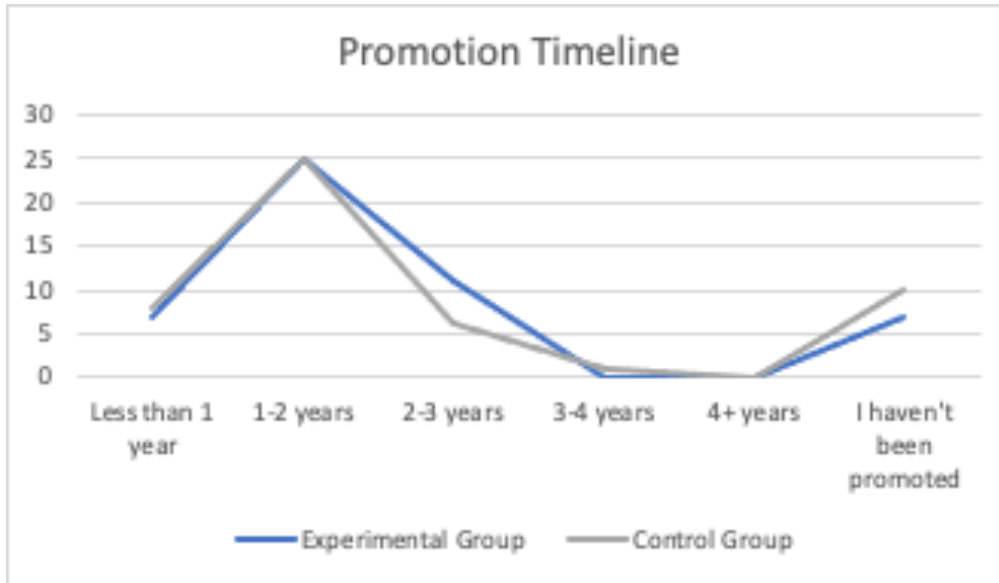
1. How quickly were you promoted at your first job after college? If you're still in college, how quickly do you expect to be promoted?

The respondents were given the below options to choose their answer from.

- a. Less than one year
- b. 1 - 2 years
- c. 2 - 3 years
- d. 4+ years

The below graph demonstrates the responses from both the experimental and control group. Although the responses vary slightly in a few places, it can be seen that the two groups largely followed the same trend regarding promotions. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between how quickly graduates who studied abroad are promoted compared to graduates who did not study abroad.





### Hypothesis 5

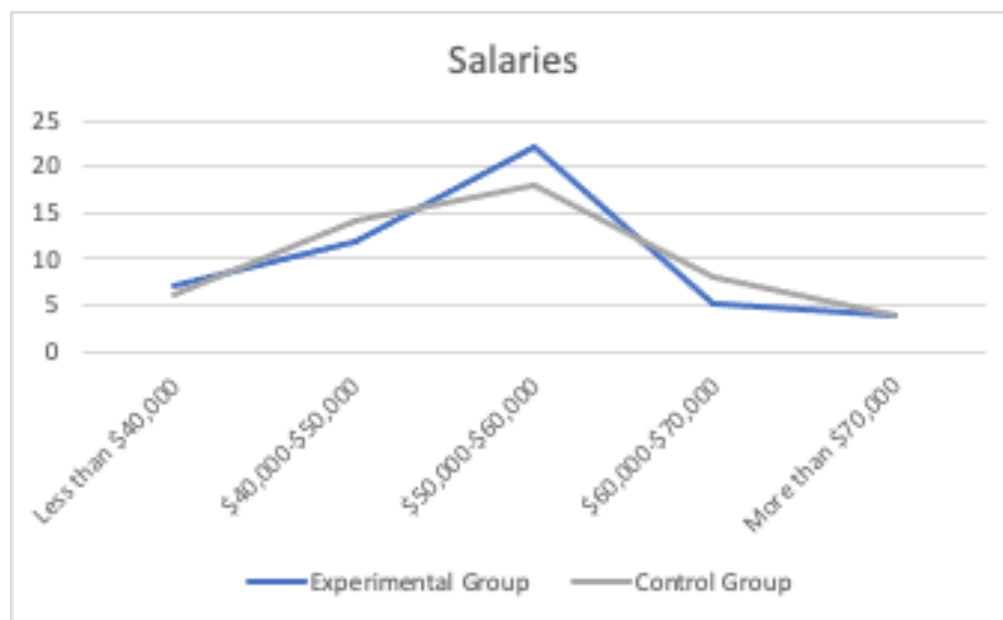
Based on the research regarding the desire of employers to hire students with international experiences, the fifth hypothesis expects that business students who studied abroad will receive higher starting salaries than those who did not study abroad. Similar to the fourth hypothesis, this was tested solely by one survey question, as displayed below.

1. What was your starting salary at your first job after college? If you're still in college, what do you expect your first salary to be?

The respondents were given the below options to choose their answer from.

- a. Less than \$40,000
- b. \$40,000 - \$50,000
- c. \$50,000 - \$60,000
- d. \$60,000 - \$70,000
- e. More than \$70,000

The graph below displays responses from both the experimental and control groups. Similar to the graph from the fourth hypothesis, although there are slight variations, the trend of responses is very similar for both groups. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between starting (or expected starting) salaries for graduates who studied abroad and graduates who did not study abroad.



## Discussion

Being that the surveys conducted in this study were a form of observational research, rather than experimental research, it cannot be claimed that studying abroad causes any direct impacts on business students' and graduates' lives. However, because of the aforementioned results, it can be claimed that there is a correlation between business students/graduates who studied abroad and their interest in working internationally, their confidence in obtaining jobs and preparedness for the workforce, and their comfortability networking with business colleagues.

## Hypothesis 1

Regarding the first hypothesis, the results were similar to what was expected. The hypothesis was that business students who studied abroad would be more interested in working internationally-based jobs than students who did not study abroad. Just as expected, it was found that those who studied abroad were more likely to accept job offers that required them to move to different countries, and they were more inclined to change their career plans to involve international work. Within this hypothesis, it was also expected that those who studied abroad would be more interested, than those who did not study abroad, in jobs which were based in foreign countries but allowed them to work out of the United States. However, a significant correlation was not found to support this expectation.

Essentially, the first hypothesis determined that business students who studied abroad are more likely to work internationally, but not necessarily more likely to work with an international firm remotely from the U.S., than business students who did not study abroad. A likely explanation for this difference could be that those who did not study abroad are uncomfortable with the thought of living outside of the United States whereas those who studied abroad are comfortable with it since they have already experienced it once. Moving forward, it would be interesting to research business students' and graduates' perceptions of working with individuals from foreign

countries. One potential reason as to why the control group respondents claimed they would work remotely for an international firm could be that they were simply unaware of the many differences in work cultures. They may have assumed that a job with an international firm would be no different than a domestic job. Researching further into perceptions of working with foreign teammates would help determine if business students who did not study abroad would actually be prepared to work for an international firm.

### Hypothesis 2

The results of testing the second hypothesis were also similar, but not exact, to what was anticipated. The second hypothesis was that business students who studied abroad would feel more confident in their ability to obtain jobs and would feel more prepared to enter the workforce than students who did not study abroad. It was found that those who studied abroad were more confident that they would have a post-graduate job, and they felt more prepared to enter the business world following graduation. However, the results showed that there was not a correlation between studying abroad and how confident the students were that they would secure their two required Butler internships. This could potentially be a result of all the assistance and assurances that Butler University provides to students searching for internships. Since students receive so much assistance, securing internships may not be enough of a real-world experience to feel the benefit of studying abroad.

To expand upon this research, it would be beneficial to universities if the exact causes of the confidence and feelings of preparedness for the workforce could be determined. Although there is a correlation between studying abroad and an increased feeling of confidence and preparedness in the business workforce, this study did not examine what experiences abroad were the most beneficial to students. If researchers could determine what particular experiences lead to the most benefits, whether it be internships abroad; living with host families; traveling in spare time; etc., universities would know which experiences to encourage.

### Hypothesis 3

Testing of the third hypothesis revealed exactly what was expected. The third hypothesis was that business students who studied abroad would be more comfortable networking with business colleagues than business students who did not study abroad. It was found that business students who studied abroad both claimed to be more comfortable networking with colleagues in the business world and were also more likely to reach out to strangers on LinkedIn.

Similar to what was mentioned in the discussion of the second hypothesis, it would be very beneficial to universities if researchers could determine which aspects of study abroad help students develop networking confidence. Being that networking is such a crucial part of working in the business world, it is of utmost importance that business schools prepare their students to be personable, professional, and confident when meeting new colleagues.

An additional way to further this research would be to set up an experimental study which could determine cause and effect. As aforementioned, since this study was solely observational, it is only able to determine that there is a correlation between business students who study abroad and

increased confidence when networking. Therefore, it is undetermined if studying abroad actually causes students to become more confident networkers. It could be that students who are confident networkers simply tend to be the students who study abroad because they enjoy meeting new people, hence why further research is needed.

#### Hypotheses 4 & 5

While the three prior hypotheses were all at least somewhat supported by the data, the fourth and fifth hypotheses did not have statistically significant data to support them. The fourth hypothesis was that business students who studied abroad would be promoted faster than those who did not study abroad. Similarly, the fifth hypothesis was that business students who studied abroad would receive higher starting salaries than those who did not study abroad. Therefore, it cannot be determined that studying abroad is correlated with quicker promotions or higher salaries for business students.

These two hypotheses were based on secondary research which displayed that employers place immense value on hiring employees with international experiences, such as studying abroad. One of the primary reasons that employers place such value on international experiences is because they want their employees to be culturally competent enough to work with fellow employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders who are not from the United States. The Covid-19 pandemic has led many companies to switch to telecommute work, thereby enabling global teams to form. When global teams are formed, all employees must be culturally competent in order for the team to be fully functional. Being that the Covid-19 pandemic is still relatively new, it is possible that this study did not accurately reflect employers' newfound appreciation for international experiences. The majority of the respondents graduated before the pandemic began and therefore, their starting salaries, and potentially their first promotions, likely occurred at a time when employers did not place as much value on the cultural competence that business students reap from studying abroad. Therefore, this research should be reevaluated in approximately five to ten years when employers have adequately rewarded employees who demonstrate cultural competence and function well on global teams and with foreign stakeholders.

#### Overall Discussion

Although the fourth and fifth hypotheses did not reveal statistically significant results and should be reevaluated in a few years, data regarding the first three hypotheses was statistically significant. There is a significant correlation between business students who study abroad and their desire to work internationally, their confidence in obtaining jobs and preparedness for the workforce, and their comfortability networking with colleagues in the business world.

When considering these findings, it is evident that they would be relevant to three different audiences; students considering studying abroad, business schools, and study abroad offices. For students who are considering studying abroad, this study is a testament to how impactful a study abroad experience can be, particularly as it relates to their future career. For business schools, this study demonstrates the importance of reevaluating their policies and curriculum to ensure that all students are encouraged and able to study abroad. For study abroad offices, this study

poses the larger question of whether all students' career paths, regardless of their majors, would be significantly impacted by an experience abroad.

Moving forward, that larger question is one which researchers should be considering. As aforementioned, previous research has made it evidently clear that students gain cultural competence and soft skills when they study abroad, regardless of their major. This study has now made it clear that studying abroad increases business students' desire to work internationally, confidence in obtaining jobs and preparedness for the workforce, and comfortability networking with colleagues in the business world. However, this study focused solely on business students. As an extension of this study, the impact of studying abroad, as it relates to the career paths of students of differing majors, such as education and criminal justice, should be examined.

## **Conclusion**

Whereas students have previously been critiqued for taking a "semester vacation" when studying abroad, this research aimed to demonstrate a range of benefits that business students' career paths reap from the study abroad experience. The surveys conducted examined how studying abroad correlated with business students' and graduates' desire to work internationally, confidence and preparedness to enter the workforce, comfortability with networking, speed of promotions, and starting salaries. After analyzing fifty surveys from the experimental group and fifty from the control group, it can be concluded that business students who study abroad are more likely to work internationally, to be confident in their ability to obtain jobs and be prepared to enter the workforce, and to be comfortable networking with colleagues in the business world than business students who do not study abroad.

There were three primary limitations to this research, the first being that the full effects of the recent Covid-19 pandemic likely were not demonstrated in this study. The initial expectation was that since many companies turned to remote work and began forming global teams as a result of the pandemic, employers would place additional importance on hiring culturally competent employees. Since employers would prefer employees with international experiences, it was expected that the employees who studied abroad would receive higher starting salaries and would be promoted faster. However, since only twenty-six of the one hundred sample respondents graduated in 2020 or 2021, there is likely not enough data covering pandemic and post-pandemic employment. This lack of data following the onset of the pandemic may have led to inaccurate results regarding the difference in promotion times and starting salaries between business students who studied abroad and those who did not study abroad. Results would likely be more accurate if the research was reconducted in a few years when more post-pandemic data is available.

The second primary limitation of this study was that the use of surveys only allowed for a certain level of analysis. Ideally, the research would have begun with the surveys and then survey respondents would have later been asked to take part in in-depth interviews. Conducting interviews would have allowed interviewees to expand on many of their experiences abroad, therefore providing a better look into which experiences abroad are the most impactful. However, because of limited time and a limited budget, this study solely analyzed survey results.

The third primary limitation was that the research was observational rather than experimental. Being that the research was solely observational, cause and effect cannot be claimed. Rather, it can only be claimed that there is a significant correlation between business students who study abroad and their desire to work internationally, their confidence in obtaining jobs and preparedness for the workforce, and their comfortability networking with colleagues in the business world. Moving forward, it would be beneficial to conduct an experimental research study containing the variables which were shown to be correlated in this study.

Although the nature of the study prohibits it from being stated that causation was found, the correlation identified in this study is crucial to defining the importance of study abroad experiences in business students' lives. Whereas previous research primarily focused on the concept that studying abroad helps students develop cultural competence, this study focused specifically on business students' career paths and how they vary based on whether the students studied abroad. This study made it evident that business students who studied abroad are more likely to desire to work internationally, more confident that they will obtain and be prepared for jobs, and more comfortable networking with colleagues in the business world. Therefore, this research has made it increasingly apparent that studying abroad is far from a vacation and rather, is a real-world educational experience which business schools should be encouraging their students to embark upon.

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## Appendix

Figure 1

1. What is/was your graduation year?
2. What calendar year did you study abroad?
3. What country did you study abroad in?
4. Were you involved in any particularly meaningful experiences/programs (internships, work-to-study, volunteer work, unique classes, language immersion, additional travel, etc.) while abroad? If so, please explain.
5. What career did you want to pursue when you started college?
6. What career do/did you want to pursue after graduation?
7. On a scale of 1-7, how likely would you be to take a job that required you to move to a different country?  

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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8. On a scale of 1-7, how likely would you be to take a virtual job that was based out of another country, but allowed you to live in the U.S.?  

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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9. How quickly were you promoted at your first job after college? If you're still in college, how quickly do you expect to be promoted?
  - a. Less than one year
  - b. 1 - 2 years
  - c. 2 - 3 years
  - d. 4+ years
  - e. I have not been promoted
10. What was your starting salary at your first job after college? If you're still in college, what do you expect your first salary to be?
  - a. Less than \$40,000
  - b. \$40,000 - \$50,000
  - c. \$50,000 - \$60,000
  - d. \$60,000 - \$70,000
  - e. More than \$70,000
11. On a scale of 1-7, how prepared did/do you feel to work in the business world right after graduation?  

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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12. On a scale of 1-7, how confident were you that you will/would have a job right after graduation?  

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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13. On a scale of 1-7, how comfortable are you networking with colleagues in the business world?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

14. Have you ever reached out to a stranger on LinkedIn for your professional benefit?

a. Yes

b. No

15. On a scale of 1-7, how confident are/were you that you will/would secure your 2 Butler-required internships?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

16. Is there anything that you would like to share about how your college experiences prepared you for your career?

Figure 2

1. What is/was your graduation year?
2. Did you study abroad?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. What career did you want to pursue when you started college?
4. What career do/did you want to pursue after graduation?
5. On a scale of 1-7, how likely would you be to take a job that required you to move to a different country?
 

1      2      3      4      5      6      7
6. On a scale of 1-7, how likely would you be to take a virtual job that was based out of another country, but allowed you to live in the U.S.?
 

1      2      3      4      5      6      7
7. How quickly were you promoted at your first job after college? If you're still in college, how quickly do you expect to be promoted?
  - a. Less than one year
  - b. 1 - 2 years
  - c. 2 - 3 years
  - d. 4+ years
  - e. I have not been promoted
8. What was your starting salary at your first job after college? If you're still in college, what do you expect your first salary to be?
  - a. Less than \$40,000
  - b. \$40,000 - \$50,000
  - c. \$50,000 - \$60,000
  - d. \$60,000 - \$70,000
  - e. More than \$70,000
9. On a scale of 1-7, how prepared did/do you feel to work in the business world right after graduation?
 

1      2      3      4      5      6      7
10. On a scale of 1-7, how confident were you that you will/would have a job right after graduation?
 

1      2      3      4      5      6      7
11. On a scale of 1-7, how comfortable are you networking with colleagues in the business world?
 

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

12. Have you ever reached out to a stranger on LinkedIn for your professional benefit?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
13. On a scale of 1-7, how confident are/were you that you will/would secure your 2 Butler-required internships?
- 1      2      3      4      5      6      7
14. Is there anything that you would like to share about how your college experiences prepared you for your career?

Figure 3

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Experimental Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Number that changed career choice during college	36	36
Average who would move countries for job	4.8	2.58
Average who would work virtually for international company	4.62	4.52
Average preparedness for workforce	5.8	5.34
Average confidence in securing post-grad job	5.96	5.44
Average networking comfortability	5.94	5.02
Average confidence in securing internships	6.08	5.96
Number who have contacted stranger on LinkedIn	34	25

Figure 4

<b>How Quickly Promoted</b>	<b>Experimental Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Less than 1 year	7	8
1 - 2 years	25	25
2 - 3 years	11	6
3 - 4 years	0	1
4+ years	0	0
I haven't been promoted	7	10

Figure 5

<b>Starting Salary</b>	<b>Experimental Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Less than \$40,000	7	6
\$40,000 - \$50,000	12	14
\$50,000 - \$60,000	22	18
\$60,000 - \$70,000	5	8
More than \$70,000	4	4