
A Case Study: Multidisciplinary Faculty Members' Study Abroad Experiences in a Nursing Course

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the lived experience of three faculty from different disciplines engaged in an experiential undergraduate nursing study abroad (SA) course, which is largely absent from the literature. This research found specific personal and professional transformative effects of multidisciplinary SA involvement of faculty. Considerations for faculty planning to engage in multidisciplinary SA will be identified, including impacts of faculty dynamics and physical and psychological demands. These findings further highlight, document, and contribute to the growing literature related to the experiential impacts of SA on faculty professional development.

Keywords: study abroad, multidisciplinary faculty, experiences, professional development, experiential learning

Higher education is increasingly seeking to be more globally minded and intentional in producing graduates who can be internationally connected, more culturally competent, well-rounded, and able to promote partnerships across borders thus creating a cohesive experiential learning experience (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017; Corbin Dwyer, 2019; Osawkwe, 2017; Walsh et al., 2020). Colleges and universities are promoting international education and study abroad (SA), as well as the inclusion of global perspectives into courses.

The Forum on Education Abroad (2018) reported that 81% of U.S. private institutions and 99% of public institutions are actively attempting to send a great number of students abroad. This commitment to engaging students in preparation to lead and serve in a connected society is often documented in universities' strategic goals and initiatives (Strange & Gibson, 2017), and in turn, the number of U.S. higher education students participating in experiential SA experiences has increased in comparison to prior years (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2020).

U.S. students continue to favor faculty-led, intensive, semester-long SA programs, which account for 95.2% (n = 260 out of 273 respondents) SA program offerings (Niehaus & Wegener, 2019; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2018; Walsh et al., 2020). The development and implementation of SA programs by faculty shed light on the ever-evolving process of faculty development, professional growth, and the benefits of mentorship and collaboration between faculty, students, and peers. Shagrir (2017) examined the outcome of teacher educators' faculty collaboration and concluded that "all participants believe that collaboration with their colleagues contributes to their professional and academic development" (p. 338).

A literature review related to faculty SA experiences and outcomes yielded findings on the following topics: potential work with other cultures, course internationalization, promoting faculty cultural competency, and faculty teaching goals (Buchanan et al., 2021; Corbin Dwyer, 2019; Gouldthorpe et al., 2021; Leigh, 2013; Niehaus & Wegener, 2019; Philips et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2013; Walters et al., 2017). Barczyk et al. (2012) explored the perceptions of faculty engaged in a research-focused short-term SA in Poland intended to "foster academic cooperation and collaboration" (p. 18). Barczyk et al. (2012), as well as Sharratt and Planche (2016), concluded that carefully planned, intentional offerings of learning have the potential to establish and strengthen relationships and create collaborations capable of producing outcomes that benefit faculty and students.

Students who SA in other countries get a great deal from the experience, particularly in terms of their academic success, personal development, and ability to function in different cultural contexts (Nguyen et al., 2018). In particular, students note a growth in positive traits such as self-confidence, independence, initiative, communication, cultural awareness, and professional achievement (Mikulec, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018). These students credit learning about a different culture and expanding their education beyond the classroom with contributing to their individual growth (Kerr, 2020). Most students return from SA courses with improved critical thinking abilities, and greater flexibility than they had before studying abroad (Nguyen et al., 2018; Schenker, 2019). Furthermore, compared to those who did not SA, those who did SA show more interest in international politics, cross-cultural concerns, cultural globalism, less prejudice, and less ethnocentrism (Medora et al., 2020; Nelson & Luetz, 2021). Increased intercultural competence is the most commonly cited advantage of SA (Hoff, 2020). The academic benefits of SA include increased interest in and dedication to the student's field and a deeper understanding of the culture and history of the host country (Medora et al., 2020; Nelson & Luetz, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2018).

Faculty that take part in SA programs see improvements in areas such as leadership, critical thinking, self-assurance, and tenacity. Not only that, but research by Ogden et al. (2020) shows that faculty's pedagogical strategies have a direct impact on students' ability to learn and take interest in class. Faculty participation in cultural mentoring was found to vary significantly by their rank, sex, race, discipline, and number of previous international travel experiences (Niehaus et al., 2018; Niehaus & Wegener, 2019). Other scholars have pointed out that faculty backgrounds, especially their foreign experience, shape both their level of intercultural competence and the methods they use to help their pupils, acquire their own (Mikulec, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Schenker, 2019). Since faculty members' disciplinary training and socialization in some professions may lead them to emphasize disciplinary material above reflection, experience, and intercultural learning, knowing the disciplinary context of short-term SA may be especially crucial (de Wit, & Altbach, 2021).

While there has been research into the methods faculty employ in delivering SA courses, far less has examined the factors that draw faculty to teach such courses. It was found in Savishinsky's (2012) research on faculty-led short-term study abroad programs that instructors "repeatedly and often passionately related the myriad personal and professional rewards" (p. 187) of teaching SA courses, such as building stronger relationships with their students and sharing SA experience. Nonetheless, faculty members are not often acknowledged for their work in internationalizing their campuses and leading short-term SA courses. In

2016, approximately 10% of schools considered international participation when making promotion and tenure choices (American Council on Education, 2017).

Course internationalization directly aligns with the goals of campus-wide internationalization, with faculty development within this component being critical to graduating students with a diversified and well-rounded worldview (Leigh, 2013; Osawkwe, 2017). Internationalization is defined as “a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected institutions” (ACE, 2017, p. 1). The ACE (2017), as well as de Wit and Altbach (2021), noted that over two-thirds of institutions are engaging in at least a moderate level of internationalization. Additionally, nearly all those institutions cited internationalization as one of their top five priorities (Niehaus & Wegener, 2019). Gouldthorpe et al. (2012) examined short-term, post-international experienced faculty reflections on “changes from initial attitudes or beliefs, perceived benefits gained from participation in the program, and anticipated impacts on academic activities” (p. 17). These findings confirm that following a SA experience, faculty aspire to integrate global-related activities into their courses and research (Gouldthorpe et al., 2012).

By participating in the SA experience, faculty highlighted their capacity to “adapt, be interested in students and treat them as individuals, embrace challenge, and be comfortable with feeling uncomfortable” (Corbin Dwyer, 2019, p. 4). It was concluded that universities should support faculty teaching abroad, as it is a productive, valid professional development endeavor (Mok et al., 2018). This aligns with the findings of Niehaus and Wegener (2019), who discovered that some of the most important aims for faculty development include cultural learning, challenging ethnocentrism, travel skills, course content, and career development. Gouldthorpe et al. (2012) examined self-identified short-term faculty outcomes following a short-term (14-day) SA experience to Ecuador and found that faculty gained insight, developed new collaborations, and recognized the potential for future interaction within their group. This exposure to various backgrounds afforded the opportunity to appreciate other fields that at-home experiences cannot offer, and further supported a change in perspective away from cultural stereotypes. A follow-up study 2 years later explored faculty outcomes related to the SA experience (Roberts et al., 2016) and identified changes related to “attitudes, aspirations, knowledge, and behaviors” (p. 30). Among the results, faculty cited the benefits of meeting new colleagues, value in learning from others, and the importance of interactions with other disciplines (Roberts et al., 2016).

Corbin Dwyer (2019) concluded that formal exposure to diverse people and their perspectives helps educators “reflect on their pedagogical assumptions and strategies” (p. 10) and further described teaching abroad as an “effective professional development approach which creates spaces that promote growth-producing experiences for faculty” (p. 10). Although it is evident that faculty involvement in SA is critical to meeting higher education institutional goals related to internationalization, supporting faculty research, and promoting professional development and growth, the literature is limited to specific experiences of multidisciplinary faculty engaged in SA courses. Leigh (2013) explored the motivations, desired outcomes, and influence on the professional practice of three faculty of different disciplines engaged in their own SA course at the same destination and concluded that leading SA courses have short and long-term effects on faculty development, specifically knowledge and eagerness toward their own discipline, internationalization, expanding their practice and role, and personal outcomes. Moseley (2009) further highlighted concepts related to transformational faculty development, role expansion, and greater appreciation for knowledge obtained outside the institution. Opportunities for enhanced research opportunities as well as greater satisfaction with scholarly efforts are explained. As such, projects related to SA efforts promote the inclusion of students (Moseley, 2009).

To the best of prior knowledge, research has been conducted on the topic of faculty members teaching SA courses from several disciplines. Therefore, this case study investigates the perspectives of three multidisciplinary faculty teaching a nursing SA course. The results of this research provide important

insights into the ways faculty members' professional and personal lives are impacted from such an experience. This study draws conclusions related to transformative effects on faculty personal and professional development. Considerations for faculty planning to engage in interdisciplinary SA will also be identified. Research is limited on the impact of SA on faculty's personal and professional development (Corbin Dwyer, 2019). This case study serves to further identify, explain, and contribute to the growing body of literature by defining SA's experiential impacts on faculty's interdisciplinary understanding and collaboration.

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Methods

Case Study

A case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (i.e., a "case"), set within its real-world context - especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." (Yin, 2014, p. 18). Research in educational and health settings has frequently employed this method to analyze several persons and their behaviors in a real-world context (Merriam, 2009).

The case study approach helps to focus on a specific time and location. By doing so, the researchers can learn more about the subject and how they interact with others (Schoch, 2020). Case studies answer inquiries that begin with 'what' or 'how,' as well as those that are descriptive or exploratory in nature (Yin, 2012). According to Schoch (2020) the ideal number of cases used in a case study is three to four cases. The "case" in this study was defined as the faculty members who were required to complete a pre-and post-survey following a SA course. The unit of analysis and observation were individual faculty members (n = 3).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology was utilized as the philosophical approach to this qualitative study. Study participants' descriptions of the phenomena, as well as derived meanings, are interpreted by the researchers (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges researchers' past experiences and this knowledge may add value to the study (Neubauer et al., 2019); thus acknowledgment, rather than bracketing bias, and reflection of such was included in the data analysis process.

Sample

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, and three female faculty members from different disciplines (i.e., nursing, biology, and health science respectively) who participated in a nursing SA course consented to take part in the study. One of the faculty members was the instructor of record for the course, the second faculty member went on the course as a chaperone, and the third faculty member went on the SA component to determine future opportunities to teach a SA course in her designated discipline.

Pre- and Post-Survey

Faculty completed pre-and post-SA anonymous surveys consisting of open-ended questions. Survey questions included: "I want to learn more about the other faculty members professionally and their role in their field; I want to explore the possibilities of engaging in scholarly activities and collaboration"; and "Do you expect your goals to be met, partially met or not met? How and/or Why?". Survey questions were developed by two primary researchers based on the literature review and were the same in both pre-and post-surveys.

Crystallization was done to analyze the surveys for the credibility of experiences by comparing peer-reviewed articles, *testimonios* (individual person experiences), and anthologies of related experiences (Ellingson, 2009). This process was done as data triangulation was not possible in this case study.

Data Analysis

The surveys were completed via Google Form. Following this, the data were imported into NVivo 12 Plus software. Data were coded by the two primary researchers and a student researcher using NVivo 12 Plus software. A researcher's bias was acknowledged as one of the researchers had also taken part in the study as a participant.

Researcher or investigator triangulation was done as three separate researchers coded the data separately. Upon coding completion, the researcher team discussed themes and findings, collectively agreeing on the results. Interrater reliability assessed with a Kappa coefficient was 0.98, indicating nearly perfect agreement between the researcher team.

The process of coding consisted of identifying a significant event and then coding it as something prior to moving on to the interpretation stage. In order to be considered 'good,' a code must accurately reflect the whole qualitative range of the phenomenon being coded. Coding the data prepares it for analysis and the development of themes. To put it simply, a theme is a pattern in the data that either describes and organizes the possible observations or, more often, explains certain features of the phenomenon.

Results

Data was coded from the completed surveys into four parent nodes, or primary themes: Comparative, Experience, Learning, and Work. After reviewing the initial results, the researchers determined that it would be of the greatest benefit to focus on the data represented within the Experience parent node to examine the most impactful experiences of the faculty members that participated in the study. To that end, the Experience parent node was further separated into four child nodes or secondary themes: Interpersonal, Interprofessional, Intrapersonal, and Intraprofessional.

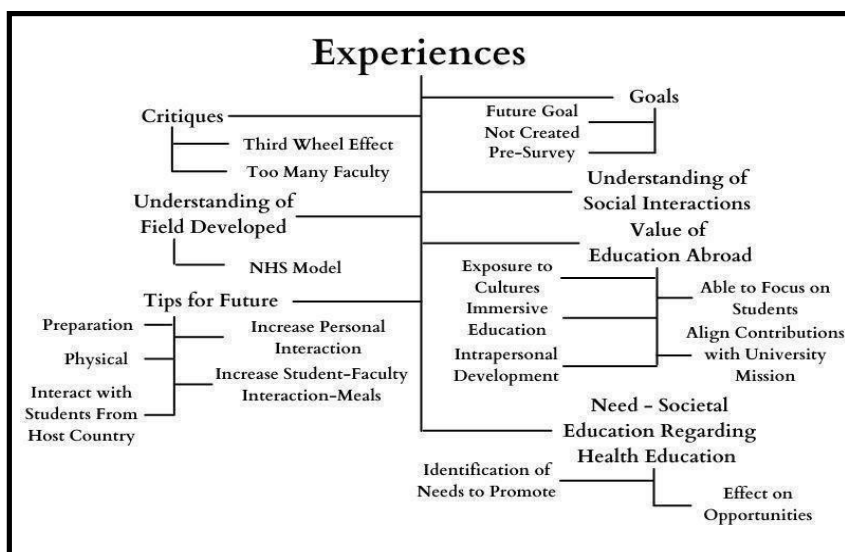
The child nodes begin with the prefix inter-related to data regarding how one person is related to others, while the prefix intra-related to data is representing one person's individual experience. In relation to the number of instances in which a researcher coded one of the child nodes, the Interpersonal Node was coded 22 times, the Interprofessional Node 100 times, the Intrapersonal Node 54 times, and the Intraprofessional Node 53 times. This information suggests that the largest number of conclusions, perspectives, or impacts experienced by the participants is related to Interprofessional development. The overall themes that emerged from the data illustrate the impact of studying abroad from the faculty's unique perspective and individual experiences.

Experiences Node Overview

Multiple secondary themes emerged from the Experience parent node: Value of Education Abroad, Goals, Understanding of Field Developed, Need for Societal Education, Regarding Health Educators, Understanding of Social Interactions, Critiques, and Future SA Trips (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Children Nodes/Secondary Themes of Experiences and Each of their Subcategories



Interpersonal Node

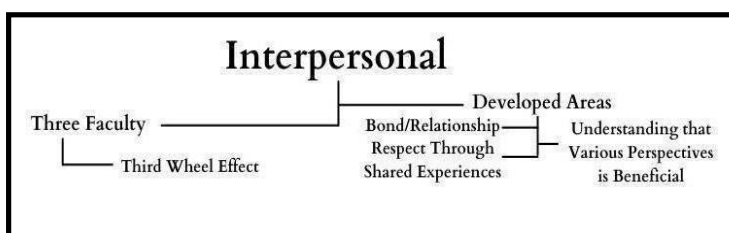
Two tertiary themes emerged from the secondary theme Interpersonal Node: Developed Areas and Three Faculty – “Third Wheel” Effect. Developed Areas identifies numerous instances in which participants expressed a perspective or conclusion that related to this theme. These perspectives or conclusions were compiled into two main sub-themes related to personal development experience from the SA course: Bond/Relationship and Respect through Shared Experiences and Understanding that Various Perspectives/Diversity is Beneficial. A quote from one faculty member that expresses the overall conclusion of the secondary theme of Interpersonal Node is as follows:

I was able to share my expertise that was applicable to the student content we were discussing. Most of our time was spent experiencing the course content we were being exposed to. I think the most learning from each other would have been through social interactions and not direct discussions about our professional fields.

An unexpected finding, explored in greater detail in the discussion section, is the “Third Wheel” Effect, meaning a third person who is or feels least relevant or necessary within the group (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Children nodes/Secondary Themes of Interpersonal and each of their Subcategories

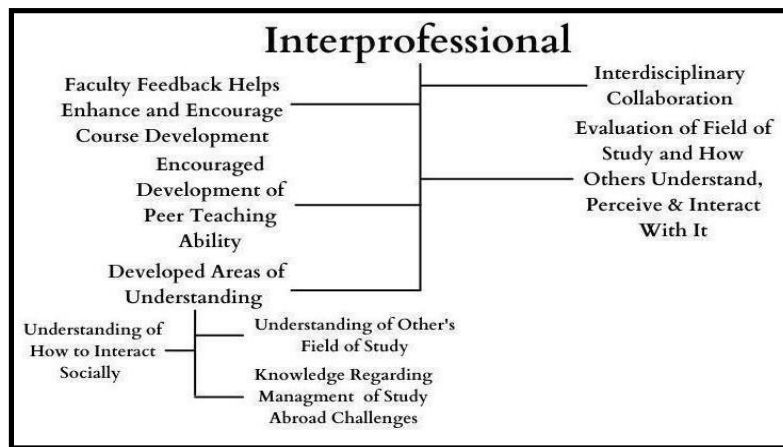


Interprofessional Node

Six tertiary themes emerged from the data related to the Interprofessional Node: Faculty Feedback Helps Enhance and Encourage Course Development; Interdisciplinary Collaboration; Demand of SA on Faculty; Encouraged Development of Peer Teaching Ability; Evaluation of Field of Study and How Others Understand, Perceive, and Interact with the Field; and Developed Areas (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Children Nodes/Secondary Themes of Interprofessional Node and each of their Subcategories

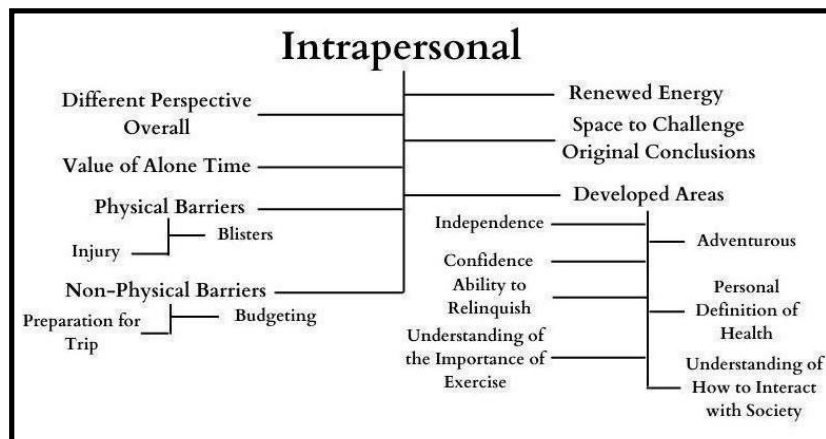


Intrapersonal Node

Seven tertiary themes emerged from Intrapersonal Node: Developed Areas, Different Perspective Overall, Value of Alone Time, Renewed Energy, Space to Challenge Original Conclusions, Physical Challenges, and Non-Physical Challenges (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Children Nodes/Secondary Themes of Intrapersonal Node and each of their Subcategories

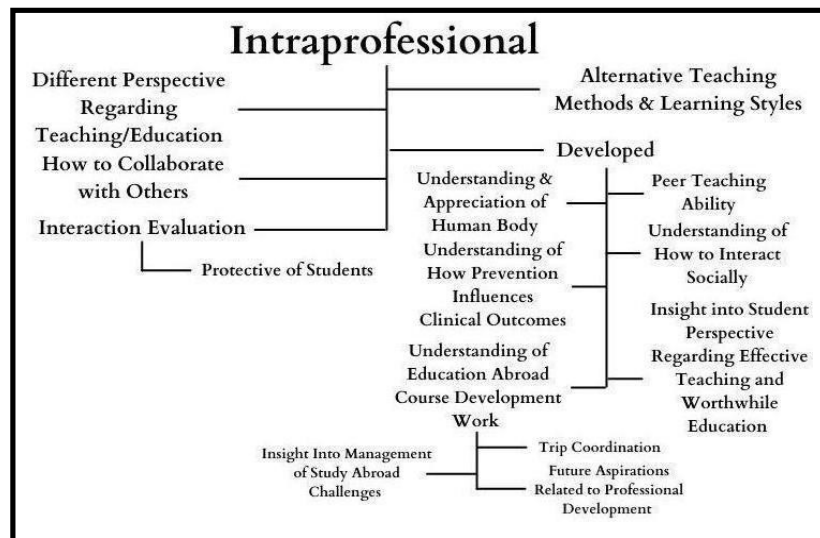


Intraprofessional Node

Relating to the final secondary theme, Intraprofessional, five tertiary themes emerged from the data: Different Perspective Regarding Teaching/Education, Alternative Teaching Methods and Learning Methods, How to Collaborate with Others and Critically Think Together, Developed Areas, and Interaction Evaluation (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Children Nodes/Secondary Themes of Intraprofessional Node and each of their Subcategories



Discussion

This case study reinforces and expands upon findings observed in the current literature (Corbin Dwyer, 2019; Osawkwe, 2017; Walsh et al., 2020). Faculty participation in an SA course and immersion within a new shared experience allows for unique and often extensive engagement with other faculty. The shared experiences and collaboration associated with SA courses provide a unique backdrop for potentially profound personal and professional benefits (Niehaus & Wegener, 2019; Walsh et al., 2020). Collaboration with faculty from other backgrounds enhances the development of new knowledge and broadened perspectives (Blau et al., 2020). In turn, this promotes the exchange of thoughts and ideas, including diversity of instructional methods and styles as well as enhancement of critical thinking skills. Opportunities are abundant for faculty development, growth, and collaboration related to SA engagement that may not be afforded by traditional on-campus work.

The “Third Wheel Effect” was among the study’s unexpected findings, as well as to a significant degree by which it was reported by one faculty member. In scholarly research, the term third wheel is made about feeling like a third wheel when making health decisions or regarding being the third wheel in a relationship (Clayton, 2014; Triberti et al., 2020). In this study, the third faculty member, due to the nature of her role during the trip, felt she did not contribute much to the faculty as a team. This supports the work of Cooper et al. (2015) who found that new faculty benefit best from support from experienced teachers, only when they seek a strategy for instructional improvement or when better to deal with providing support to students. As a result, this faculty member tended to spend more time with students and less time with fellow faculty in general. While faculty enjoyed being around others, they also greatly enjoyed being alone and recounted that time alone was as beneficial as group time.

In the nursing profession, cultural competence is a universal requirement (Pacquiao, 2007). International SA programs, which are becoming increasingly popular, can deliver equal learning benefits with fewer barriers than domestic study away educational experiences. Nursing students may benefit from growth during a SA program (Lane et al., 2013; Repo et al., 2017). Students who participate in SA have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture, accomplish their educational objectives, and address the cultural needs of patients in their future employment. The balance of alone and group time created a positive balance to the overall experience. The participants noted faculty demands and impacts. This aligns with the literature that transformative learning can be guided by faculty who have a role in shaping the SA experience to maximize the level of learning (Walters et al., 2017).

Prolonged time spent working with students had an emotional impact on the faculty in this study, as

did the sense of feeling protective of them and needing to be always accessible. Faculty availability coupled with concern for maintaining stability and well-being of students while on the trip added an unpredictable component, managed by assigning students to specific faculty as a primary contact person. The unique demands included course and program planning, mental and physical aspects of international travel, post-abroad debriefing, and reflection (Bain & Yaklin, 2019; Phillips et al. 2017; Walters et al., 2017). Kent-Wilkinson et al. (2015) highlighted many benefits of cultural exposure for students, including developing cultural knowledge, sensitivity, competence, and safety; personal and professional growth; and global citizenship. Active learning strategies for students and staff happen within SA programs. By leaving their comfort zone, students must learn to think differently, much like they will encounter in employment following nursing school. Prior research has found that learning to think differently can improve patient care and healthcare results (Lane et al., 2013; Strange & Gibson, 2017).

This study, supports and validates Leigh's (2013) as well as Niehaus and Wegener's (2019) findings and reaffirm opportunities for faculty experiences and outcomes resulting from engaging in a SA course: 1) Reinvigorating interest in one's profession; 2) Enhancement of personal and professional growth; 3) Including internationalization; and 4) Provide opportunities for leadership and course development. The following quote from this study provides an example of this directly from a faculty member's perspective:

As faculty, we hear about studying abroad as a programmatic option that is off in the distance. We are so consumed by the issues immediately in front of us that it can be difficult to fathom stepping away and leaving the office and the country. Take the opportunity in front of you, work hard, recruit harder, create a quality program, take advantage of the resources provided through [your university] and through your external provider, and then gain experience every minute to the fullest.

Additionally, this case study highlights practical lessons that can be discerned from the SA experiences (Stebleton et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

Limitations

Study limitations include a minimal sample size of faculty participants in an undergraduate elective nursing course at a primarily female institution. Unique case study elements that may also be limiting include a participant sample of three faculty from different programs with varying roles in the course: primary faculty, secondary faculty who were not previously known by the primary faculty, and one faculty member who attended as an apprentice/mentee to learn more about faculty-led abroad courses. As Leigh (2013) and this study reveal, the person least involved in, or least directly connected to, the course tends to feel they have contributed less with regard to the overall experience, although others may not share this perception.

Future Research

Potential future research includes study replication with a larger sample size, studying intradisciplinary or interdisciplinary, with or without longitudinal exploration, of SA impact on faculty development, internationalization, and/or teaching. Exploration of physical and psychological impacts on faculty who engage in SA may be further researched as well. As additional research is generated in this area, the impacts of SA on faculty's personal and professional development may be further elucidated and documented, including interprofessional collaboration and learning.

Conclusion

When planning a SA course, faculty should identify the purpose for each faculty member's participation, such as co-faculty record, secondary faculty, observer, or mentee, and develop a plan for their role abroad. Understanding each faculty member's purpose and the role will clarify expectations, goals, and the level of engagement for all. Consider if the faculty dynamics are best suited for facilitating an SA course.

To foster positive interpersonal dynamics and group cohesion, create opportunities for faculty to engage with each other and build connections before the SA experience. Thus, faculty may wish to consider their professional goals and role as they determine whether to participate in an SA course. Faculty benefit professionally and personally from SA experiences; however, the discoveries and lessons gained, as well as the significance of such experiences are based on each faculty's personal and professional goals.

Statements and Declarations

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study follows compliance with ethical standards.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

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Appendix 1: Faculty Pre and Post Surveys

Pre-Survey

- 1) I have no goals in particular.
- 2) I want to learn more about the other faculty member professionally and their role in their field
- 3) I want to learn and share ideas about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)
- 4) I want to learn more about the other faculty member's field of expertise
- 5) I want to learn how the other faculty member's field of expertise relates to mine
- 6) I want to explore the possibilities of engaging in scholarly activities and collaboration.
- 7) I want to stimulate my professional growth
- 8) I hope the other faculty member(s) enhance(s) what I am doing during the trip
- 9) I hope to explore a diversity of ideas
- 10) I want to share my talent
- 11) I want the other faculty member to share their talent
- 12) I want to help the other faculty members learn during the trip
- 13) I like to work with others and engage with different fields
- 14) Do you expect your goals to be met, partially met or not met? How and/or Why?
- 15) What value (personal, professional) are you expecting to derive from this experience?
- 16) What do you expect to learn?

Post Survey

- 1) I had no learning goals in particular.
- 2) I learned more about the other faculty member(s) professionally and their role in their field.
- 3) I learned about and shared ideas about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) with the other faculty member(s).
- 4) I learned more about the other faculty member(s) field of expertise.
- 5) I learned about how the other faculty member(s) field of expertise relates to mine.
- 6) I explored the possibilities of engaging in scholarly activities and collaborations with other faculty member(s).
- 7) The other faculty members stimulated my professional growth.
- 8) The other faculty members enhanced my work on this trip.
- 9) I grew professionally and personally as a result of working with other faculty member(s) on this trip.
- 10) I explored a diversity of ideas with/because of the other faculty member(s).
- 11) I was able to share my talent with the other faculty member(s).
- 12) The other faculty member(s) shared their talent with me.
- 13) I helped other faculty members learn on this trip.
- 14) I like to work with/engaging with others from different fields more as a result of this trip.
- 15) Were your goals met, partially met, or not met? How and/or why?
- 16) Was there something unexpected that affected your experience?
- 17) Was the experience worth it? Would you do it again?
- 18) What value (personal, professional, etc.) did you derive from this experience?
- 19) What did you learn?
- 20) What did this education abroad experience do that will impact your role as a faculty member?
- 21) What advice would you give to other faculty members regarding this education abroad experience?