



Victoria Parker is a doctoral student in the Department of Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication (ASEC) at Purdue University. She earned her Master of Science in ASEC and graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with a concentration in Agribusiness from Prairie View A&M University. Victoria currently serves as the graduate assistant for Purdue's Black Cultural Center, where she coordinates program sessions and excursions constructed around African American history. Her research interests focus on the study abroad and collegiate experiences of Black students.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, study abroad has experienced gradual growth in Black student involvement. During the 2018-2019 academic year, Black students studied abroad at their highest rate to date at 6.4%. However, White students make up 68.7% of study abroad students. The disproportion in Black and White student involvement is the result of inequitable access. Therefore, this research brief examines the barriers that hinder Black students from studying abroad and suggests ways that these barriers can be addressed. Additionally, this brief contributes to the limited research showcasing the study abroad engagement of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

"The benefits of study abroad are almost endless. First of all, it's going to make you much more marketable here in the United States, because more and more companies are realizing that they need people with experiences around the world, who can speak different languages, who can transition easily into other cultures and people who bring to their jobs a sensibility and a sensitivity for other people."

—First Lady Michelle Obama—

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INTRODUCTION

Data related to student study abroad participation indicates the existence of racial disparities (Sweeney, 2013). For example, less than 32% of U.S. study abroad participants are students of color (IIE, 2020). Black students, in particular, encounter challenges and inequitable access to study abroad (as evidenced by the fact that they only make up 6.4% of study abroad students). Despite gradual increases in Black student involvement over the past ten years, White students continue to constitute the majority of study abroad students at 68.7% (Schulze, 2016; IIE, 2020). Some of the key reasons for this inequity are targeted study abroad outreach, lack of financial resources, and lack of knowledge about study abroad opportunities. As First Lady Michelle Obama suggests in the opening quote, there are many benefits for all students who participate in study abroad programs, including being more competitive in the job market. Study abroad has been shown to increase academic performance, retention, and graduation rates (Barclay Hamir, 2011; Kuh, 2008; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). This research brief examines these barriers for Black students and suggests ways to be addressed them. Additionally, this research brief contributes to the limited research showcasing the study abroad engagement of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Drawing on original research and interviews with Black study abroad students at HBCUs, the guiding questions addressed include:

1. What are the primary benefits of studying abroad, particularly for Black students?
2. What barriers hinder Black students from participating in study abroad?
3. What advice do Black students who participated in a study abroad program have for other Black students interested in study abroad?
4. How can HBCUs better support Black students in studying abroad?
5. How can we increase access to study abroad for Black students at all institutions?

BENEFITS OF STUDY ABROAD PARTICIPATION

Study abroad is viewed as an opportunity for students to “expand their undergraduate education” (Stebbleton et al., 2013). In recent years, international education has seen an increase in the number of study abroad programs offered by American universities. Higher education institutions have heavily endorsed study abroad due to the multiple benefits studying abroad offers institutions and students (Giedt et al., 2015). These benefits include: 1) increased retention and graduation rates, 2) cultural awareness, 3) career development, and 4) shifts in attitude, interests, and values.

INCREASED RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Study abroad has been shown to have a positive influence on the academic performance of student participants and is recognized as a High Impact Practice (HIP) which utilizes student engagement to foster deep learning (Kuh et al., 2010). While studying abroad, students are required “to work with their peers beyond the classroom and test what they are learning in unfamiliar situations” (Kuh, 2008, p. 17). Study abroad participation has been shown to contribute to higher Grade Point Averages (GPAs), retention, and graduation rates (Barclay Hamir, 2011; Kuh, 2008; Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Young, 2008). Young (2008) found study abroad participants are 20% more likely to remain in school than students who do not study abroad. Furthermore, Barclay Hamir (2011) found students who participate in a study abroad program graduate at a rate of 97.5% compared to non-participants at a rate of 77.2%

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Study abroad is a useful tool for enhancing students' cultural awareness. While studying abroad, students develop intercultural competencies through interactions with a host country's citizens (Williams, 2005). Studying abroad also provides students the opportunity to gain experience with living and working with people who come from different backgrounds (Lee & Green, 2016). Students who participate in study abroad become more open-minded and increase their level of comfort with people who are different from them (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). For example, Maharaja (2018) found many student participants to have “gained a better appreciation of, a greater respect for and acceptance

of cultural differences” (p. 33). Students who participate in study abroad also gain a greater perspective of the world once abroad; students often realize “the whole world is not like the United States” (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 170).

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Study abroad has shown to have a positive effect on students’ career development. In particular, studying abroad develops leadership and problem-solving skills by “teaching students to take responsibility for their own decisions as they are away from direct family contact and cannot rely on other adults to make decisions for them” (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015). Student participants become more prepared to work in a diverse workplace due to their interactions with different cultures while abroad (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Participating in study abroad has shown to lead to better labor market outcomes for students (Li, 2016). For example, many students credit obtaining job interviews and receiving their first job offers to their study abroad experience, as they believe it makes them more marketable (Oppen, 1991; Esmieu et al., 2013; Teichler & Janson 2007).



SHIFTS IN ATTITUDE, INTERESTS, AND VALUES

Students have reported experiencing shifts in attitudes, interests, and values as result of studying abroad (Hadis, 2005), such as self-awareness, assertiveness, and global-mindedness (Maharaja, 2018). Students who have positive experiences from studying abroad express increased interest in living and working abroad (Butcher et al., 2017). A student participant in Butcher et al. (2017) expresses, “I wanted to live and work overseas as an agriculturalist and this trip affirmed my desire to do so” (Butcher et al., 2017, p. 5). For students studying abroad in underdeveloped countries, being exposed to a host country’s lack of access to particular necessities and resources (e.g., running water, easy access to grocery stores, and fast food) can lead them to developing more gratitude for what they have in America (Dawson, 2000). Regardless of where they study, while abroad, students often develop a deeper understanding of themselves due to being outside of the comfort zones of their hometowns or university communities (Tolliver, 2000). Moreover, being immersed into a different environment can often produce a positive shift in a student’s personality traits (e.g., independence and self-confidence) upon their return to the U.S. as a result of having “the time, space, to devote to themselves and their inner lives” (Jackson, 2006, p. 206).

BARRIERS HINDERING BLACK STUDENTS FROM PARTICIPATING IN STUDY ABROAD

Study abroad programs were initially created with a targeted audience of White middle- and upper-class students due to programs “only being offered at the most exclusive schools, which overwhelmingly consisted of wealthy White students” (Simon and Ainsworth, 2012, p. 2). In recent years, there has been a push to increase Black student study abroad participation. However, today, there are still multiple barriers hindering Black students from going abroad. The five most commonly cited barriers include: 1) financial, 2) lack of support from family, 3) racism, 4) lack of outreach, and 5) insufficient peer mentoring.

FINANCIAL BURDEN OF STUDYING ABROAD

The financial cost of studying abroad is the most common barrier in a Black student’s pursuit of studying abroad (Wanger et. al. 2020). Studying

abroad typically consists of multiple fees—tuition, flights, housing, health insurance, and meals. A study abroad program's cost is mainly determined by its duration and location. For example, a semester abroad in China, on average, costs \$6,614 (GoAbroad, 2019). Similarly, a semester abroad in Sydney, Australia, costs on average \$22,596 (GoAbroad, 2019). Black students often encounter difficulty in obtaining financial support to participate in a study abroad. Although scholarships exist to support study abroad participation, Black students are often unaware of such financial opportunities due to the lack of sources of information for obtaining scholarships (Key, 2011; Jackson, 2006; Cheppel, 2012). In addition to being unable to afford studying abroad, Black students also encounter work obligations as studying abroad requires students to miss work for a duration of time. In addition, to losing temporary income, a student often faces an increased likelihood of losing their job if they participate in a study abroad for an extended amount of time (Kasravi, 2009).



LACK OF SUPPORT FROM FAMILY TO STUDY ABROAD

Parental approval to study abroad is vital in the decision-making process for Black students (Gaines, 2012). Gaines (2012) found 70% of Black students consider opposition from family an important factor in their decision-making process to study abroad. Black students often encounter disapproval from their families to study abroad, which typically stems from the parent's lack of personal experience traveling abroad (Brux & Fry, 2010; Kasravi, 2009). Parents also tend to worry about how safe a host country will be. For example, they are afraid their child will encounter racism and even violence while studying abroad. This is a common concern for Black parents (Brux & Fry, 2010), who often fear their child will be discriminated against due to being Black. Research suggests that this concern is a valid one, as one of the most significant barriers Black students encounter while studying abroad is racism (Doyle, 2018).

RACISM WHILE ABROAD

It is not unusual for Black students to encounter racism from non-Black students in their study abroad program. When they are the only Black student on a study abroad trip, Black students often experience isolation and racial microaggressions from others (Talbert & Stewart, 1999; Willis, 2012). Additionally, racism from the host country's citizens is a common experience for Black students. In particular, Black students can be discriminated against due to their skin complexion and hair type (Key, 2011). Additionally, Black women students are at times victims of racialized sexual harassment (e.g., catcalling) while abroad (specifically in Europe and Latin America) due to the fallacy that Black women are sexual objects (Willis, 2015; Doyle, 2018). A Black woman in Willis (2015) expresses, "They [Spaniards] definitely commented on my skin... Not conversing...But more catcall type of thing...Sometimes it was okay and sometimes you could tell it was a little rude" (Willis, 2015, p. 220).

LACK OF OUTREACH TO BLACK STUDENTS

Using outreach strategies that inform Black students about the benefits and range of study abroad programs is essential, however,



many institutions are lacking in their efforts to attract and recruit Black students to these programs (Brux & Fry, 2010; Key, 2011). Oftentimes study abroad marketing materials do not showcase a diverse student population nor actively target Black students (Mazyck, 2014; Key, 2011). Similar to other underrepresented populations, Black students pursue study abroad at a higher rate when a faculty member or advisor encourages them to participate in a study abroad program (Ali, 2015). Yet, studies have shown White faculty members (the highest represented racial group in postsecondary institutions) lack in their efforts to recruit Black students to study abroad, oftentimes due to cultural differences (Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; Brux & Fry, 2010). Although they have a low presence in postsecondary institutions, Black faculty and administrators have been shown to provide Black students with adequate assistance throughout their study abroad process (Covington, 2017).

LACK OF BLACK STUDENT PEER MENTORING

The role of peer mentoring is critical to prospective students choosing to study abroad, especially Black students (Bruce, 2012). Due to the small numbers of Black students who do study abroad, seeking advice on study abroad from someone who identifies as Black is often difficult for Black

students to access (Lee & Green, 2016). Black peers, who have studied abroad, provide prospective Black study abroad participants with a high level of trust and credibility, resulting in Black students becoming more open to studying abroad (Bruce, 2012). Black students also tend to be less motivated to pursue a study abroad program when there is a lack of peer mentoring on study abroad.

HBCUS AND STUDY ABROAD

Similar to Black students, HBCUs encounter barriers in study abroad (e.g., lack of financial resources to fund study abroad programs). However, HBCUs continue to send more Black students abroad each year (IIE, 2017). Over the years, HBCUs have made strides to increase Black student access to and participation in study abroad. These efforts include creating initiatives that make study abroad more feasible for HBCU students (Covington, 2017). For example, HBCUs have provided their students with free passports through partnerships with external providers (e.g., CIEE). Although HBCUs have made contributions to study abroad, there is a lack of research showcasing HBCU engagement in study abroad. To highlight HBCUs, the participants in this study were selected due to their enrollment at an HBCU while studying abroad.

METHODS

This study used semi-structured one-on-one interviews to gain insight into the perspectives of Black students who have studied abroad while attending an HBCU. I conducted and recorded the interviews via Zoom; They lasted 25-45 minutes. The interviews focused on participants' study abroad experiences. Additionally, participants gave advice for Black students hoping to studying abroad. In this research brief, the findings focus on their advice. Recordings were transcribed by transcription professionals from a trusted transcribing company—Rev. com. Transcriptions were then checked for accuracy. Once complete accuracy was achieved, I coded the transcripts to discover common themes.

PARTICIPANTS

I conducted interviews with six Black alumni who each obtained a bachelor's degree from an HBCU. These institutions included Lincoln University of Missouri, Prairie View A&M University, and Virginia State University. Students received their bachelor's degrees between 2016-2020. While in attendance, participants took part in at least one study abroad program. Between the years 2015-2018, participants studied abroad in Mexico, Canada, Haiti, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ghana, South Africa, Namibia, and multiple other Sub-Saharan African countries. Their study abroad programs were focused on academic development, career development, and service learning. Program duration ranged from 1 week (spring break) to 16 weeks (a semester).

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant	Gender	Age	Undergraduate Major	Study Abroad Destination
Jasmine	Woman	27	Agriculture	Ghana
Samantha	Woman	24	Health	Canada; Haiti
James	Man	24	Agriculture	Costa Rica; Mexico; Sub-Saharan Africa
Gabrielle	Woman	25	Mathematics & Pre-Engineering	Costa Rica
Matthew	Man	24	Criminal Justice	Canada; South Africa
Tyler	Man	22	Agriculture	El Salvador; Costa Rica

TABLE 2. PARTICIPANTS' STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCES

Participant	Study Abroad Experience
Jasmine	During the last year of her undergraduate studies, Jasmine studied abroad in Ghana for a semester. She attended a Ghanaian university where she studied agriculture business. In addition to taking agricultural courses, Jasmine was enrolled in courses that taught her about African history, art, and culture. To better communicate with the Ghanaians, she took a language course to learn how to speak Twi, a Ghanaian dialect.
Samantha	Samantha participated in a service-learning study abroad in Haiti for a week. She visited multiple orphanages where she gave donations to those impacted by the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Samantha also assisted in the construction of a community amphitheater by building the steps with tires and mud.
James	For his first study abroad experience, James studied abroad for a month in multiple sub-Saharan African countries. His trip centered around studying cultural pluralism and photojournalism in agriculture as it relates to developing countries. James took courses, with African students, which focused on how different cultures interact with each other. As a requirement for his photojournalism course, James captured photos of agriculture development and practices as he traveled throughout Africa.
Gabrielle	While studying abroad in Costa Rica for a week, Gabrielle participated in agritourism. She had the opportunity to milk cows and utilize the milk to make yogurt. Gabrielle also toured multiple farms to gain insight into how Costa Rican agriculture is operated.
Matthew	For three months, Matthew participated in a study abroad internship program in South Africa. As an intern, he worked with a non-profit organization that provided human-trafficking victims with the needed resources to exit prostitution. Matthew also interned at a group home that served teenage boys and adult men from impoverished communities. Additionally, he attended a cultural analysis course focused on Cape Town's history, law enforcement system, and government system.
Tyler	During a week-long study abroad in Costa Rica, Tyler attended agriculture business courses at a local university. From these courses, he learned self-sustainable farming practices that Costa Rican farmers use. Also, Tyler visited a commercial coffee plantation to observe the Costa Rican coffee production process.

FINDINGS

All participants emphasized the importance of Black students studying abroad. Each participant also encouraged Black students to participate in a study abroad program. As they reflected on their experiences abroad, they recalled the monetary and nonmonetary barriers they encountered with studying abroad and what they wished they would have known about study abroad sooner. Through their study abroad experiences, participants were able to offer advice to other Black students. Their advice centered on three major themes: 1) getting out of their comfort zone, 2) overcoming fear, and 3) obtaining funding. Participants shared the need for open-mindedness while abroad and a willingness to explore unfamiliar territory. Participants addressed students' common fears about studying abroad but explained why they should overcome those fears. Many participants mentioned how they obtained funding for their study abroad experiences and provided tips on finding financial resources to pay for study abroad.

ADVICE FOR BLACK STUDENTS ON STUDYING ABROAD

Step Out of Your Comfort Zone

Jasmine, a 27-year-old Ph.D. student who studied abroad in Ghana, discussed the need for students to be open-minded while abroad. She shared, "Overall, if you're going to go abroad, have an open mind...Try to be more understanding in the different occurrences that may appear, that are not so familiar to you in your home state." Jasmine wants students to understand that their experience in a foreign country will be different from what they are used to back home. However, students should be willing to participate in new activities while abroad.

Samantha, a 25-year-old mathematical engineer who studied abroad in Canada and Haiti, also expressed the importance of discovering other perspectives: "I would just encourage every student, whoever you may be just to apply to any study abroad. Even it's for a week, a day, even if it's out of a state in a different state, just anywhere you haven't been. Just explore that, because being in your own little bubble and just staying in your school, you don't get to experience the world that way."

She encourages students to explore the world and travel to somewhere they've never been before, even if it is only for a short amount of time. By traveling, students will gain new experiences.

OVERCOMING FEAR

James, a 24-year-old Ph.D. student who studied abroad in Costa Rica, Mexico, and multiple Sub-Saharan African countries, reassures Black students that they should not be afraid to study abroad. He shared, "I would tell any Black student, do it, do not be afraid. I don't care if you're afraid of planes, take a boat, do whatever, but do it. You should always take every opportunity to do what you can." James acknowledged the common fear students might have with flying. This fear can be a major barrier to a student deciding to study abroad. However, students shouldn't let their fear of flying hold them back from studying abroad when there are other means to traveling (e.g., taking a train or driving a car).

Gabrielle, a 25-year-old business owner who studied abroad in Costa Rica, expresses her desire for Black students to feel capable of studying abroad. As she noted, "I would tell them that even though it's hard to believe that someone that looks like you can do it [study abroad], cancel the fear. Cancel the fear that you're not able to do it, because you can do it." As the first person in her family to travel abroad, Gabrielle understands why students who do not personally know someone who has been outside of the U.S. may believe they are not capable of studying abroad. Although students may not see someone who looks like them studying abroad, it is possible for them to have a successful study abroad experience, similar to Gabrielle.



OBTAINING FUNDING

Throughout the interviews, participants acknowledged the costliness of studying abroad. However, each participant in this study received scholarships to study abroad. They stated those scholarships were a deciding factor in their decision to pursue a study abroad experience. Matthew, a 25-year-old probation officer who studied abroad in Canada and South Africa, explains how scholarships assisted him in paying for his study abroad expenses. He stated,

“There is funding available. There are people who are out there that want to pay for your study abroad experience. Look into the department of international studies and whoever’s, your own institution. Secure funding. I traveled to Canada and South Africa for free. I didn’t have to pay for my airline ticket, I didn’t have to pay for my program. Only thing I paid for was my food, and my living expenses, of course. Toiletries, things like that. There are resources that are out there. Do research, find them, apply for them.”

The financial cost of studying abroad is a major barrier for Black students. However, it was not a barrier for Matthew because he was able to receive the needed funding to cover his major study abroad expenses. His study abroad experiences show that there are ways to pay for study abroad without using personal finances.

Tyler, a 22-year-old government employee who studied abroad in El Salvador and Costa Rica, also emphasized the availability of funding for Black students to study abroad. He noted, “Look at any opportunity to go and study abroad. If you don’t think you can afford it, look for scholarships. As every school will have some financial aid to help you with that. It might not be a full amount, but you’re Black or you go to an HBCU. Somebody is going to make a way so that you can do that [study abroad].” Centered on the mission to educate Black Americans, HBCUs provide Black students with the needed resources to be successful in and outside of the classroom (Williams & Davis, 2019; Grillo et al. 2017). The study abroad initiatives at Tyler’s HBCU allowed him to study abroad for free. Similar to other students, he believed he could not financially afford to study abroad. His perspective changed once he was made

aware of the study abroad scholarships available at his institution.

DISCUSSION

Although participants encountered multiple barriers during their study abroad process, they each overcame those barriers and had a successful experience abroad. The findings from this study show Black students believe others should be more open to traveling abroad because it is an opportunity to get out of one’s comfort zone and grow as a person. Furthermore, the findings suggest participants in this study see the need for Black students to overcome their fears of being abroad. Participants express that fear of any type should not hold a student back from experiencing different parts of the world. Lastly, findings from this study reveal that Black students view studying abroad as a feasible option for Black students due to funding availability, including numerous funding opportunities that allow Black students from HBCUs to study abroad for free.

IMPLEMENTATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Institutions devoted to uprooting the barriers that hinder Black students from studying abroad should commit to making study abroad more diverse and inclusive. Based on the literature and findings from this study, the following practices should be implemented to increase the representation of Black students in study abroad:

1. Institutions should create study abroad scholarships that assist Black students in paying study abroad fees—tuition, flights, meals, and housing. Doing so will help ensure that students do not have to worry about how they will finance their study abroad experience.
2. Institutions would benefit from providing parents with study abroad informational sessions that cover the benefits of study abroad and safety measures that are implemented while abroad. By offering these sessions, the parents of Black students may become more aware of what studying abroad has to offer their child and may become more comfortable with their child being abroad.

3. Institutions should incorporate diversity and inclusion training in study abroad for program coordinators. This training should expose the bias Black students encounter in study abroad. Additionally, to produce a supportive environment, study abroad practitioners should be trained to create “brave” spaces for Black student participants. By doing so, Black students may feel more comfortable expressing their concerns to their program coordinator.
4. Institutions should integrate intentional and guided reflections into their study abroad programs. Throughout the study abroad process, students should be encouraged to analyze and convey the value of cultural differences so that they are better prepared for intercultural experiences.
5. Institutions should develop partnerships between their diversity, equity, and inclusion office and study abroad office. This partnership should result in the development of initiatives that improve recruitment and retention of Blacks in study abroad.
6. Institutions should create a diversity and inclusion student ambassador program for study abroad. This program should consist of Black students, who have studied abroad, mentoring prospective Black students on the study abroad process. Having Black peer mentors not only promotes diversity efforts in study abroad but also serves as a tool for recruiting Black students to pursue study abroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There a number of recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study. First, additional research should examine why Black students from HBCUs choose to study abroad. Analyzing the reasons why Black students pursue study abroad opportunities may shed light on how to tailor study abroad programs to be more appealing to Black students.

Additionally, future research should be conducted on the study abroad orientation, application, and placement process Black students at

HBCUs experience. By examining the process Black students undertake in order to study abroad, other Black students may view study abroad as a viable opportunity.

Finally, future research should explore the practices that HBCUs utilize to increase Black student access to and participation in study abroad. Although HBCUs encounter barriers in study abroad (Covington, 2017), HBCUs have been successful in their efforts to send more Black students abroad each year (IIE, 2017). During the 2015-2016 academic year, HBCUs sent 2,036 students abroad compared to 1,605 students in 2013-2014 (IIE, 2017). By examining the mechanisms used by HBCUs, Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) may gain insight into how to improve their study abroad outreach and marketing strategies for recruiting Black students.

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