



2016

## The Influence of International Education Travel on African American High School Students' Intent to Study Abroad in College

Vankeila Simmons  
*Loyola University Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses)



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Simmons, Vankeila, "The Influence of International Education Travel on African American High School Students' Intent to Study Abroad in College" (2016). *Master's Theses*. 3568.  
[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/3568](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/3568)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 2016 Vankeila Simmons

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION TRAVEL ON AFRICAN  
AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' INTENT TO STUDY ABROAD IN COLLEGE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM CULTURAL EDUCATION AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

VANKEILA SIMMONS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2017

Copyright by Vankeila Simmons, 2017  
All rights reserved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
THESIS: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	1
Position Statement	4
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
THESIS: METHODOLOGY	11
Overview of Study	11
Context of Study and Program	13
Analysis	14
THESIS: FINDINGS	15
Participant Demographics	15
Students with no Intentions of Studying Abroad	17
Students Who Intend to Study Abroad as a Result of the Service Learning Trip	18
Students Rethinking Study Abroad Locations as a Result of the Service Learning Trip	19
Students Who Intended to Study Abroad Prior to the Service Learning Trip	20
College Majors	22
CONCLUSION	24
Suggestions for Future Research	27
LIMITATIONS	28
APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION SURVEY	30
APPENDIX B: EDUCATIONAL GOALS SURVEY	32
APPENDIX C: POST-TRIP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	34
APPENDIX D: STUDENT CONSENT FORM	37
APPENDIX E: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM	40

BIBLIOGRAPHY

43

VITA

45

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants

16

## ABSTRACT

There is very little research exploring the factors that affect minority, more specifically African American, students' intent to study abroad. Furthermore, most research concerning study abroad participation focuses on higher education institutions. There is a gap in current literature on high school students of color participating in global education. This study seeks to provide an explanation and understanding of how early exposure to international education travel may impact African American students' intent to study abroad in college or select a major with an international aspect. Through a qualitative case study this study focuses on 11 Southside College Prep High School (a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the school and students) seniors in Chicago, IL who attended a week-long school Service Learning Trip to Ecuador over Spring Break (March 29- April 6, 2014). Each student completed a background survey, 5-point assessment survey, and semi-structured interview upon returning from the trip. The gathered data was analyzed in order to answer my primary research question: Does exposure to educational international travel prior to college influence African American students' intent to study abroad in college?

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In this new “global economy,” international awareness, and cultural communication skills are becoming increasingly more significant, thus students who have been exposed to international travel (particularly in an educational setting) have an advantage on those students who lack that exposure. According to multiple studies on study abroad programs, participation can be especially influential in improving intercultural competency and foreign language skills (Dessoiff 2006). Gonyea (2008) also claimed that students who study abroad tend to become more deeply engaged in reflective learning experiences upon their return to college from studying abroad. Foreign study is critical to producing new generations of leaders prepared to operate in this global society. In light of these findings, many institutions of higher education have advocated for increases in study abroad funding and participation for all students.

The increased promotion of study abroad participation has been somewhat successful in the United States. In the 2011-12 academic year, 283,332 U.S. students received academic credit for study abroad, a 3.4 percent increase from the prior year (Institute of International Education, 2014). This number is nearly double the 160,920 U.S. students who received academic credit for study abroad in the 2001-02 academic year, ten years earlier (Institute of International Education, 2014). While the number of U.S. students participating in study abroad programs has increased significantly in the past decade, the diversity among those students has shown very little growth. In the 2009-10 academic year, according to data released in the 2014 *Open Doors Report* by the



Institute of International Education, about 78 percent of study abroad students were White, while African American students comprised only about five percent of students who study broad (Institute of International Education, 2014). These numbers are significant considering the fact that at the time, Whites represented only 61 percent of enrollment in higher education while African Americans were approximately 14 percent of the college population (Institute of Education Sciences, 2012). The U.S. study abroad population is most certainly a misrepresentation of the U.S. college population.

Despite targeted outreach and the availability of financial aid, African American students study abroad participation has not seen the intended levels of growth. This slow growth may indicate that current outreach practices may not be touching the heart of the issues preventing Black students from studying abroad at the same rate as their White peers. Several study abroad researchers have explored possible reasons for minority students' apprehension to studying abroad. One of the most reoccurring issues cited is financial hindrance among students of color. Minority students are less likely to study abroad because of financial barriers (Dawson, 2000; Dessoiff, 2006). Over the past decade, however, there has been a drastic increase in the amount of grants, scholarship and financial aid provided to students of color for study abroad, and the growth in participation has been marginal.

Several researchers discuss the benefits of study abroad participation for African American students, however research on strategies addressing this specific group has been limited (Dawson, 2006; Penn & Tanner, 2009; Salisbury et, al, 2009). While researchers are careful to report the percentages of students' participation by race/ethnicity (i.e. African Americans, Hispanic, Asian, Multiracial, etc.), solutions to the problem of participation have

been largely focused on all minority students as opposed to solutions to address the needs of specific groups. When research has focused on specific groups, the solutions have usually been related to providing more financial aid, or occasionally offering “alternative” programs for African American students. One-dimensional approaches, such as offering programs in countries with large Black populations, or increasing scholarship funds, are not enough (Redden, 2007). Even with the incremental growth, there is still more research about the reasons for lack of African American participation in study abroad than research about factors that influence students’ intent to study abroad.

Much of the study abroad research focuses on institutions of higher education, however researchers, such as McCllelan (2010), have determined that international education travel is beneficial to younger students as well. Despite the recognition that exposure to international education travel is beneficial for secondary school students, there is a lack of data on high school student participation in such programs; specifically participant data about race and ethnicity. The focus has primarily been on the underrepresentation of minorities in study abroad at the post-secondary level.

My research provides an area that has not been fully developed in the promotion of study abroad to African American students. My research focused on a specific group of African American high school seniors who participated in a week-long service learning trip to Ecuador in March/April 2014. All of the students had applied to college at the time of the trip, and many of them had already received college admissions. These students may have varying degrees of exposure to international travel. The goal of my research was to gauge whether participation in an educational international trip, such as this one, in secondary school would have any bearings

on potential participation in study abroad programs in college, or the desire to choose a major with an international component.

### **Position Statement**

My first exposure to international travel was as a third year college student at the University of Virginia (UVA). I participated in an eight-week program during the summer before my final undergraduate year. I had the opportunity to study in two countries (Jamaica and Belize), and the experience was transformative. While I still did not know exactly what I wanted to do for a career, I knew that I wanted to be a part of an organization that helped other students like me gain exposure to international travel. Upon arriving to UVA, I had no intentions of studying abroad. Quite honestly, I had never heard of it before, and I knew of no one who had done it. My interest only developed after making several friends who had traveled extensively. Despite my socio economic and cultural background, I believed that I could compete with the other students academically, however I knew there was no substitute for the travel experience I lacked. I chose to study abroad because I believed that college would be the only opportunity I would have to travel internationally, considering the fact that my family had not done that type of travel before. Little did I know, that would only be the beginning of my travel experiences. It also led the way for some of my family members to start traveling. This research question developed out of my belief that I would have participated in a year or semester-long study abroad program if I had been exposed to international education travel earlier.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

An abundance of research has been conducted on the lack of minority participation in study abroad during the undergraduate years. Many of the studies have yielded outcomes such as lack of financial availability (Dessoiff, 2006; Salisbury et, al , 2009), choice in majors, lack of exposure, attending schools without study abroad offices (Salisbury et, al, 2009), and low attrition rates among minority students. Dawson (2000) even claimed that African American students are less likely to study abroad because the benefits are long-term, and are not directly or immediately recognizable. It is unclear of whether this particular research referred specifically to African American full-time college students because college enrollment is the delaying of the instant gratification that is a job and immediate paychecks. These studies all focused on what has prevented students of color from studying abroad rather than the intent of those students to participate in international education programs. If the goal is to increase minority participation in study abroad, as claimed by many universities and government programs, it is important to know what effects the desire of minority students to participate in study abroad programs. Perhaps knowing the intent, or lack thereof, may lead to more viable ways to increase the diversity among U.S. study abroad students.

Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen and Pascarella (2009) are among the few researchers to study choice process and intent to study abroad. In the fall of 2006, they conducted assessments among 4,501 first-years at 19 different colleges that expressed interest in participating in the study. They found that lower income students are less likely to plan

on studying abroad, also students' intentions to study abroad increases with the level of average parental education. With regards to race and ethnicity, they found that Asian Pacific Islanders are less likely to plan to study abroad than their White peers, however "other students of color do not differ from Whites in their intent to study abroad" (Salisbury et, al., 2009, p. 144). This finding suggests that the low participation of certain minority groups in study abroad may be attributed to something other than the lack of desire. The researchers also noted that social and cultural capital gained prior to college enrollment is positively related to the intent to study abroad. While Salisbury et, al (2009) conclude that intent to study abroad is substantially influenced by pre college socio economic status, social and cultural capital, the study participants have already entered college. It is difficult to ascertain whether students from lower socio economic backgrounds intent to study abroad would change with the exposure to international education travel prior to college.

Drawing upon the work of sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, Ballentine and Spade (2009) defined cultural capital as cultural practices, including but not limited to, dress, language patterns and knowledge of the world deriving from life experiences. Likewise, they define the term social capital, introduced by James S. Coleman, as the network of relationships between individuals, groups, and entities. Everyone has cultural capital, but the form of cultural capital is related to one's social background. In regards to study abroad, social and cultural capital might include availability of information, previous international travel and navigating multicultural environments (Salisbury et, al., 2009). According to Dessoiff (2006), the majority of study abroad participants are White women. He suggests that the reason for the over representation of White women in study abroad may stem from the eighteenth and nineteenth century practice of

sending wealthy daughters to finishing schools in European countries. Carlson et. al., (1990), however, suggested that students who study abroad tend to have previously traveled abroad, are academically successful, and have parents who are highly educated. Regardless of the factors that contribute to students participating in study abroad programs, studies have shown that students who study abroad have added benefits including, better understanding of the world and how they fit in it (Penn & Tanner, 2009). Minority and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds could benefit most from these added bonuses of study abroad, and yet are receiving them less.

The Lincoln Commission (2005) cited the majority of study abroad participants as historically being in the humanities and social sciences. Pre-professional majors (engineering, education, and the health sciences) have been far less represented in study abroad. Data reveals that historically, minority students have been underrepresented in the humanities and foreign languages, but overrepresented in engineering (Dessoiff, 2006). The data suggest that minorities may be less likely to study abroad because they choose majors that are less likely to participate in/promote studying abroad. Furthermore, according to the 2004 Census Bureau, Black students comprise 16 percent of the first-year college population, but only 12 percent of the third year or higher population. Data may suggest that fewer minorities study abroad because study abroad typically occurs during the junior or senior year, at which point the minority population has declined.

Penn and Tanner (2009) conducted research on the campus of a historically Black college or university (HBCU) in Texas. Unlike most study abroad research, the study used only high school graduates. The graduates used in this study are African Americans enrolled in a six week

residential program at the Texas HBCU. Of the 41 participating graduates, 36 planned on attending an HBCU in the fall. The researchers tested the claims made by previous researchers that African American students are less likely to study abroad because of choice of major, attrition rates, lower levels of social economic affluence, and the lack of encouragement and support. Penn and Tanner (2009) found that the major hindrance to African American students studying abroad is a lack of academic and social connections to show how international education is an important part of their college education. They claimed that the desire is present, however the opportunity is lacking. Of the graduates surveyed, 83 percent claimed that they would study abroad in college. Many cited reasons such as, they wanted to learn about new cultures, while others wanted to visit Africa or Brazil to learn more about their own history and culture. Of the 17 percent responding “no,” reasons included, not wanting to learn a new language, lacking knowledge about other countries and needing to stay focused. While Penn and Tanner (2009) made an important claim about the intent of African American students to study abroad, they do not actually address the claims they initially claimed to test. With the population studied by the researchers, it is impossible to determine if attrition rates could be a potential barrier to studying abroad, and they do not address choices in majors at all in the study. Additionally, the authors determined that many of the graduates were knowledgeable about the costs of study abroad, but they did not determine if this would possibly deter the graduates from study abroad. Finally, in order to determine social economic status, the participants were asked about their mothers’ work “because of the strong matriarchal tradition in the Black family” (Penn & Tanner, 2009, p. 272). The authors did not specify if data was taken in instances where

participants lived in a two-parent household, in single-father homes, or with some other relative, thus the impact of social economic status could not be determined from this research.

Dessoiff (2006) suggested certain students may not be studying abroad for multiple reasons. Some of the reasons include: attending college alone is a big push for many first-generation college students, some minority students are apprehensive about racism abroad and many “students in the middle” are not eligible for financial aid, but cannot afford the extra expenses of study abroad (Dessoiff, 2006, p. 22). One of the suggested alternatives to traditional year-long study abroad programs is short-term programs. These programs are growing in popularity, and may help alleviate some of the concerns preventing underrepresented students from studying abroad. Shorter programs are becoming more popular. According to *Open Doors* 2005 data, only six percent of students who studied abroad in 2003-04 did so for an entire academic year, while 56 percent of students selected summer programs. One of the challenges is to make study abroad more central, normal, and beneficial to traditionally underrepresented students. Short-term programs can help in these goals because they “whet students’ appetites for more foreign study and travel,” and are typically more affordable (Dessoiff, 2006, p. 22). Another alternative to traditional study abroad is a service learning program. In service learning, “learning takes place under the faculty member in the structure of a traditional course (Penn & Tanner, 2009). Students feel more comfortable with faculty members from their own college (Dessoiff, 2006). Limited funding, however, is a barrier for certain institutions as well. Community colleges and colleges with large diverse populations are less likely to have study abroad offices/faculty to lead study abroad programs (Dessoiff, 2006). Students may have the desire, but not the knowledge of outside options.



There is an abundance of literature on U.S. minority students' participation in study abroad, however it primarily focuses on college students. There is limited amount of information available about minority secondary school students' intent to study abroad in college; particularly those who already have educational international travel experience.

According to the previously mentioned researchers, there are multiple factors preventing African American college students from studying abroad. Those factors include: financial barriers, lack of international travel exposure, not having the required social and cultural capital to access those resources, underrepresentation in majors that study abroad more typically, low attrition rates, fear of racism/discrimination abroad, wanting to travel to countries/continents with more people of color, and attending schools that do not have many study abroad resources. While all of these factors are very important to take into consideration, it also important to determine what sparks the intent of these students to study abroad. Furthermore, it has been cited that African American students are underrepresented in the majors that typically participate in study abroad. There is a gap in the research discussing if those students would be more likely to major in a field associated with study abroad if they had exposure prior to attending college.

## METHODOLOGY

This study has two research questions: 1.) How, if at all, does exposure to educational international travel prior to college influence African American students' intent to study abroad in college? 2.) How, if at all, does exposure to educational international travel prior to college influence African American students' intended choice in undergraduate major?

### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this study is to reveal how international education experiences of African American high school students affect college decisions. A qualitative case study was used to explore the above research questions. A case study is research that is focused on giving a detailed account of one or more cases (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). A case study was determined to be the best method for this research because it allows the researcher to focus on this particular case (African American high school students attending a service learning trip) as a whole as it exists in its contexts. More specifically, Stake (1995) defines a case as a bounded system. By studying a system with set boundaries, the researcher is better able to analyze the complex things that go on within that system. Furthermore Johnson & Christensen (2012) argued that a case study be used when a case is extreme or unique in some way and can be used to test theoretical predictions. One of the previously mentioned theories is that minority students are less likely to study abroad because of lack of exposure to international travel. This particular case has allowed the researcher to study the intent of a group of African American

students to study abroad in college who have been given this exposure to travel prior to college.

The fifteen students who participated in the Ecuador service learning trip were notified by the researcher via email about the research project. The students were given consent forms, and had the opportunity to accept or decline participation. Participants were given the opportunity to provide background information, such as race, economic status, and parents' level of education (Appendix A). Each participant then completed a survey, which used a 5-point agreement scale to ascertain students' intent to attend a higher education institution upon high school graduation, desire to study abroad in college, willingness to learn about other cultures, and apprehensions about traveling abroad (Appendix B). Participants also participated in a semi-structured interview upon their return. Their responses were recorded, and participants were assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. The purpose of the interview was to gather more information on particular themes that might emerge, as well as allow the students to expound upon answers from the survey (Appendix C). I attempted to determine if the brief study abroad experience, or any particular aspect of it, would play a role in determining future study abroad or college major outcomes. The interview gave participants the opportunity to provide more details than would be allotted in a survey alone. It enabled me to capture the lived experiences of the participants. In-depth interviewing is appropriate where depth of meaning is important and the research is focused on gaining more insight and a deeper understanding (Gillam, 2000). A qualitative case study was the best method for this research because it allowed me to describe the diversity of cognitions and behaviors in my small sample population.

The primary unit of analysis was African American high school seniors. This study sought to determine if international study experience in high school would lead more African

American students to study abroad in college, or choose majors with an international component. The participants in the study were already among a select group of high school students. It was my intention to gain data from all students attending the trip, however participation in this study was voluntary, and I was unable to reach four of the students.

### **Context of Study and Program**

15 seniors from Southside College Prep High School, a charter school located in the Englewood Community of the south side of Chicago, IL participated in a Service Learning Trip with a faculty member (Spanish teacher) from their high school from March 29- April 6, 2014. The program was advertised as being optional for any Southside College Prep senior meeting grade, discipline, and GPA requirements. The students began the application process January 2013, the Spring Semester of their junior year. All students who were interested in attending the trip were allowed to complete an application. The students were selected based on meeting GPA, detentions, and community service requirements. The detention and community service requirements were aligned with the promotion requirements for the charter school network. The selected students were then required to attend an interest meeting with a parent or guardian. In order to remain eligible for the trip, students were required to actively participate in fundraising activities in order to alleviate a financial burden for the total cost of the trip. Each students and [their] parents, however, covered the bulk of the cost for the trip. Additionally, students attended regularly scheduled meetings throughout the school year leading up to the trip with the faculty advisor in order to work on culture awareness, travel procedures, safety tips, etc.

Southside College Prep's current student population of 800 is 98% students of color (predominately African American), 92% low income, and 13% special education. There were

approximately 110 students in the class of 2014. The service learning group composed slightly over ten percent of their graduating class.

### **Analysis**

Despite the obstacles to African American college students' participation in study abroad, this study proposes that international travel and education experiences prior to college can positively influence African American students' intent to study abroad. The study also proposes that early exposure may impact a student's decision to choose a major or career path with a global aspect.

## FINDINGS

This section includes results from the post travel interviews and surveys of the 11 student travelers who opted into participation. The section presents the main results for each research question, as well as emerging themes among the students. The results also include students' majors or intended majors.

### **Participant Demographics**

All eleven participants were twelfth grade students at Southside College Prep located in the Englewood community of Chicago, IL. Each of them identified as African- American, and were between the ages of 17 and 18 years old at the time of the trip; seven females and four males. At the time of the interviews, all of the participants were enrolled in college. Of the participants, only two of the students had previously been outside of the United States, and as one of them claims, "I've only been on a cruise, when I was little, so I don't know if it counts" (Blair, personal communication, November 25, 2014). Of the remaining nine, only one of them had been on a plane prior to the Ecuador trip.

Table 1. Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Intended Major</b>	<b>Previous International Travel</b>	<b>Relatives with International Travel Experience</b>	<b>Plan to Study Abroad in college</b>
Ann	Architecture	No	Sister-traveled to Spain Parents- Vacation to Caribbean and central America	Yes
Blaire	Music	Yes- Cruise as a child	Mom- Vacation to Jamaica	Yes
Carla	Early Childhood Education	No	Sisters participated in short education programs in Japan and Spain	Yes
Dean	International Business	Yes	Several extended family members traveled to different places	Yes
Erin	Undecided	No	No	Yes
Faith	Political Science/ English	No	Uncle visited Europe	Yes
Glenn	Computer Science	No	Aunt visited London	Yes
Harper	Applied Engineering	No	No	Yes- Currently enrolled to study in Italy during the Summer
Ingrid	Political Science	No	No	Yes
Jan	Undecided	No	No	Yes
Kevin	Engineering (Chemical)*	No	No	No

Ten of the students claimed that they are very likely to study abroad in college, however only three of the students (Erin, Harper, and Glenn) attributed that likelihood to being a direct result of participating in the service learning trip to Ecuador. Those three students cited one of

the biggest sources of their fear as being a lack of knowledge. The students' fears ranged from riding a plane for the first time to not understanding the language, however the common thread was the fear that "something might happen." Upon a safe return home, and an overall good experience, those students believe that they will definitely participate in a study abroad experience in college.

Many of the students believed the one thing that made the experience worth trying to recapture was the overwhelming feeling of privilege that they felt while in Ecuador. Because the students were participating in a service learning experience, they were prepped about the type of poverty they would be exposed to while away. They knew they would be helping to build a school for students in need, however they were shocked by the reality of how much they had in comparison to how little the Ecuadorians had. "As a Black male growing up on the South side of Chicago, I had to work hard for everything I got. I even had to work just to be able to go on this trip, so to see people who think we have so much was just like wow," exclaimed Harper (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

### **Students with no Intention of Studying Abroad**

Only one student claimed that he is unlikely to study abroad in college. Because his intended major is engineering, Kevin claimed that there were no study abroad programs in his field. When asked if he would apply if his school got a study abroad engineering program, he responded, "probably not" (personal communication, January 8, 2015). He explained that he enjoyed the experience, but that he might not be able to afford it in college. Furthermore, he has some very difficult courses that may require extra attention, and study abroad would possibly conflict with that. Kevin reluctantly revealed that he had not done as well in his first semester as he originally



hoped. He discovered that he started college behind other engineering majors in the classes that he should have taken, and that he would be playing catch up if he planned on becoming an engineer. That left very little room for study abroad.

### **Students who Intend to Study Abroad as a Result of the Service Learning Trip**

Three of the interviewed students specifically mentioned feeling a sense of accomplishment and less anxiety for future travel because of completing the service learning trip; the moments when they connected to the world differently than they ever could/did at home ultimately made them want to study abroad in college. Glenn recalled a moment when a peddler was trying to sell him a belt for a measly amount of money. "I'm used to people asking for money on the street, but it was something about how he was selling trying so hard to sell something for so little that he worked so hard on. I gave him more than he asked for, and he was so happy. It kind of put my life into perspective" (Glenn, personal communication, March 19, 2015).

A guided international experience with familiar people can strongly influence the decision to study abroad among students who might not have otherwise considered it. Erin, Harper, and Glenn had different reasons for not considering study abroad prior to traveling to Ecuador. They all, however, believed that the experience fueled their motivation to study abroad in college. According to Harper, "I mean, I always thought about going somewhere, but the reason I did this trip is because I knew some of my classmates would be going, and we're all from the same place so we know each other. Plus, our teachers were going with us and they spoke Spanish, so I knew they would kind of protect us" (personal communication, March 16, 2015). Erin felt slightly different. "Study abroad just felt like it would be too long to be away, so I didn't think I would go. But after going to Ecuador, I felt like that [service learning trip] was

not long enough... I'm definitely studying abroad in college to get a better experience" (personal communication, December 16, 2014). Glenn admits that he knew about study abroad, but never thought he would have the opportunity. Of study abroad, Glenn states, "I had seen it on TV, but I never thought I would be able to go nowhere, so when the opportunity came I thought I could try it" (personal communication, March 19, 2015). Glenn claims that it helps that his first international travel experience was guided, but when the opportunity presents itself in college, he will be ready to go alone. The three students share the sentiment that because the experience turned out so well (without any major incidents), they now feel that they can study abroad with a smaller or unfamiliar group. The success of the service learning trip laid to rest unfounded fears for those students.

#### **Students Rethinking Study Abroad Locations as a Result of the Service Learning Trip**

Seven of the remaining participants claimed that they are definitely likely to participate in a study abroad program while in college, however they also stated that they had plans to do so before going to Ecuador on the service learning trip. Three of those students (Faith, Jan, and Ingrid) did, however, say that they are now considering different kinds of places as a result of the service learning experience. "I was always planning to go somewhere like Paris when I got to college because I always thought it would be so beautiful," exclaimed Faith, "but after doing the trip [Ecuador], I think I would try other places as well" (personal communication, March 19, 2015). While Faith was not exactly sure about what other places she would be interested in, she did say maybe some country in Africa or South America. She is especially considering a foreign policy program in Kenya for her junior year. Jan was also unsure of exactly where she wants to study abroad, however she knows that she would like to complete some sort of service project.

“It’s good to be able to study other cultures, but I want to be able to help others too. If I am spending a lot of time in other people’s spaces, I feel like I need to do something for them too” (Jan, personal communication, December 16, 2014). Ingrid was slightly less concerned with giving back, and more concerned with being somewhere that offers some of the comforts of home. Ingrid was not alone in missing chain restaurants, bug-free living, and lots of free Wi-Fi, however she was the only student to solely base her decisions on these luxuries. “I felt very fortunate being able to help build a school and give back to those less fortunate than me, but I could not live in the rainforest for a whole semester. I know that I will study abroad in college, but it will be in a major city” (Ingrid, personal communication, December 16, 2014).

#### **Students who Intended to Study Abroad Prior to the Service Learning Trip**

The remaining four students (Ann, Blaire, Carla, and Dean) already had intentions of studying abroad in college. They, in fact, chose to participate in the service learning trip because they were eager to travel. Dean was the only student who had traveled abroad before.

Dean had participated in a small learning trip to the Dominican Republic for two weeks during the summer before high school. He had also been to Mexico for a week when he was in middle school. Dean had always been one of the top students in his classes, and as a result was able to participate several education and community programs that sponsored learning trips.

With his eye on possibly majoring in international business, Dean figured he should get all of the international experience that he could. “I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. This trip was a lot like what I expected, but I enjoyed having the opportunity to share the experience with some of my classmates. I just think that some of them complained too much”

(Dean, personal communication, November 24, 2014). Dean also is looking forward to the new perspective that his college classmates will bring to his study abroad experience.

Not all of the four, felt the same way as Dean. Ann described the experience as, “probably the worst, but best week of my life.” “It was the best week because it taught me to humble myself... and how to be resourceful. It was the worst week because I didn’t like all of the travel by foot, the cabin style living, and the food portions were super small” (personal communication, March 18, 2014). According to Ann, the bad outweighed the good, so she is willing to do it again. She was already planning on enrolling in a study abroad program during the spring semester of her sophomore year.

Carla knew that she would study abroad because one of her sisters did, and her sister had a great experience. Her parents even encouraged Carla to participate in the Ecuador trip because all of her sisters (including a younger one) had participated in similar programs in high school and middle school. Carla was certain that she would declare early childhood education as her major the following fall, and participate in an education study abroad program the summer after that. When asked about her favorite experience, Carla exclaims, “It was visiting a farm where people were making yarn and knitting. It was amazing to see the craft, but shocking to know some of the kids couldn’t attend school because of it. It made me more passionate about education” (personal communication, March 18, 2015).

Finally, Blaire always knew that she would study abroad because she wanted to do something that other people in her neighborhood and family would not have the opportunity to do. As she claims, “Ecuador was the first step...” (personal communication, November 25, 2014). Blaire was encouraged by her Spanish teacher’s excitement, but she has always had the

desire to travel as well. She went on a cruise with her family when she was younger, but she did not think it really counted as international travel because, “I don’t really remember all the details, and I don’t think we really explored” (personal communication, November 25, 2014). The Ecuador trip allowed Blaire the opportunity to explore more, however she will not have that opportunity until her junior year of college because of a program she is participating in.

### **College Majors**

Two of the eleven students are completely undecided on a major, and at the time of the interviews had not determined if their studies would specifically include an international component. Five of the students had already determined their majors prior to the trip, and were resolved to continue with that plan post the service learning trip. Harper, who was already enrolled to participate in a study abroad program in Italy at the time of the interview, did admit that the study abroad component of his Applied Engineering program made more sense to him because of his experience on the Ecuador trip. According to Harper, he was always excited about the idea of going to Italy, however he was shocked that a technology program would even offer study abroad courses. The description of the technology study abroad program made sense to him, but his experience in Ecuador allowed him to truly understand the importance of study abroad programs to engineering majors. Carla decided during her first semester to major in Early Childhood Education because she always wanted to be a teacher, and she really enjoyed her classes. She is quite sure that her study abroad experiences will help her be a better teacher and relate to more of her students. Unlike Carla, Blaire had not decided on a major until after the trip. “I don’t know what inspired me to pursue architecture as major, but I am pretty the experience with building a school had something to do with it” (Blaire, personal communication, March 18,

2015). Other students with international fields of study did not attribute the choice to participating in the Ecuador service learning trip.

## CONCLUSION

International education travel alone is not what determines African American high school students' intent to study abroad in college, rather it is the connection to a particular experience that occurs on the trip that determines the intent. As for gauging if participation in an educational international trip, such as this one, in secondary school will have any bearings on the desire to choose a major with an international component, based on my research, the answer is inconclusive.

Existing literature, particularly Salisbury et.al (2009), suggests that it is the social and cultural capital gained prior to college enrollment that ultimately drives the intent to study abroad in college. My research confirms that this is true for the majority of the students who participated in this study. All four students who planned to study abroad prior to participation (and made no particular changes as a result) had immediate family members who had already traveled abroad, studied abroad, and/or they had been abroad themselves. Only one of the three students who planned to study abroad as a result of this trip had any family members to travel abroad (including extended relatives). Glenn specifically mentioned that he was planning to study abroad so that one day his little brother would do so as well. Perhaps one of the answers to getting more African American students to study abroad is their social and cultural capital in that area. Since giving relatives exposure to travel is not an option, perhaps more short middle and high school international travel programs will provide the much needed social capital.

Other data suggests that minority students may be less likely to study abroad because they choose majors that are less likely to include study abroad programs. This is highly unlikely as ten of the eleven students interviewed claimed to know of at least one study abroad program in their fields, intended fields, or that could count for credit in multiple fields. The same held true for the students attending small liberal arts colleges as well students attending major research universities.

Finally, the most common threat to African American students studying abroad, according to existing literature, is the lack of financial means. Money was certainly a concern for the majority of the students who were interviewed, however it was rarely the primary or only concern. Two of the students had scholarships that would cover large portions of most study abroad programs they were interested in. Current literature does not account for African American students who have the financial means available, but still choose not to study abroad. No such student existed in this research, and perhaps the number is very small in the general population. Other students planned to start saving early and applying for scholarships, which is partially why they did not plan to study abroad until sophomore and junior years. Harper has already started a GoFundMe account for the study abroad program he is currently enrolled in. Many of the students are certain they will get scholarships or financial assistance, but if not, they intend to find a way, just as they did with the Ecuador trip.

The group trip to Ecuador alleviated some apprehensions of flying, communicating in a different language, and fear of what to do if things went wrong. However, two students stated that they may have overcome some of these fears enough to travel abroad for a short trip/vacation with family or friends, but that alone would not have inspired them to participate in



a study abroad program in college. According to Ann, vacation travel would be short, include familiar faces, and be somewhat safer, especially on a resort or cruise. Study abroad initially seemed daunting because of the length of time and the possibility of staying with strangers (Blair, personal communication, March 18, 2015). It was the learning experience that really inspired the students to more adamantly want to pursue study abroad in college. Meeting people who thought they were rich, and who desired to know more about their lifestyles and cultures shifted many of the participants' perspectives about what "strangers" in other countries would be like. These students desired to achieve another level of understanding of other cultures that they could only achieve by being fully immersed into and studying that culture.

Traditional study abroad programs can be expensive, last for several weeks, and are often in places where the people do not look like or speak the language of African American students. Past research has addressed many of those issues, but much of the research falls short of determining what African American students hope to gain from the experience. Study abroad programs do have specific learning objectives, however many researchers (myself included) neglect the fact that students may have personal objectives that are not included in the syllabus. For the participants of this research who plan to study abroad in college, expense was not the major determining factor. The students did not even particularly want to go to a place where people "looked" like them, as current research suggests may be an alluring factor. In fact, for those who had already considered international travel, places with a majority population of people of African descent were pretty low on their lists. Ultimately, these students connected with the idea that they were able to do or be something greater than they were at home. This idea

resonated with the student who was in the top of the graduating class and had always planned to study abroad as well as the average student that had not given study abroad much thought before.

Early exposure to travel abroad is definitely a factor to consider in order to increase African American participation. This exposure alleviates fears, increases social and cultural capital, and make other barriers appear to be a bit smaller.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The major question that remains at the end of this research is, “do the students actually study abroad?” For future research, I would suggest a longitudinal study that goes from the first international travel experience to college completion. This would fill in the gap between intention and actuality. Also, a longer study would answer the question of college majors and career paths. Furthermore, I would suggest future researchers use a larger population size, and perhaps a program that draws students from multiple schools so as not to risk the responses being based on the same teachings.

## LIMITATIONS

This study has a few potential imitations. The study only gathers the students' intent to study abroad in college. Students' intentions do not necessarily determine if the actions will occur. A longitudinal study where the same students were contacted again in their third and fourth years of college might be more fruitful, however time constraints would not allow this type of study. The study, in its current form, is still helpful because it still allows the researcher to note the effect of early global studies on African American students' intentions.

Another limitation is that the participant population included some students who participated in the service learning trip because they already intended to study abroad in college. Also, the sample population contains participants all from the same inner city area who had to meet certain GPA and discipline requirements. The results may not be generalizable to at-risk students, or students living in rural areas.

The results also cannot be broken down by family structure or socio-economic status. These two categories may potentially reveal a difference that cannot be attributed to race. One of the distributed surveys contained categories for income and household arrangements, however some students opted out of responding, while others did not know the answers. The answers of the responding participants were not enough to include in the results.

Finally, due to a lengthy approval process, many of the student participants could not be interviewed until after they had already graduated from high school, some students could not be reached until the following December, and others were interviewed nearly a year later. Four students were unable to be contacted, reducing the study population to 11. The participating

students were able to provide answers to many of the questions based on memory of the experience, journals, pictures and videos taken while there.

APPENDIX A  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION SURVEY

**Background Information**

1. What is your ethnic background? (Please be as specific as possible)

---



---

2. How would you rate your grades throughout your high school career?

Poor       Fair       Good       Very Good

3. What is your parents' highest level of education?

Mother	Father	
—	—	Did not complete high school
—	—	High School Diploma
—	—	Some College
—	—	Bachelor's Degree
—	—	Master's Degree
—	—	Professional Degree
—	—	Unknown

4. What is the income range of your parents?

Income	
—	\$0-\$25,000
—	\$25,001-\$50,000
—	\$50,001-\$75,000
—	\$75,001 Or higher

5. Have your parents traveled abroad?

yes       no

6. How many times have you traveled outside the United States?

0     1     2     3     4     5 or more

7. If you have traveled outside of the United States, list the countries you have traveled to.

---



---



---

8. If you have traveled outside of the United States, what was the reason?

Leisure       Academic       Lived abroad

9. Why did you choose to participate in this program?

APPENDIX B  
EDUCATIONAL GOALS SURVEY

**Ecuador Service Learning Trip Survey**

1. I plan to attend college (4-year institution).

\_\_\_ agree    \_\_\_ strongly agree    \_\_\_ disagree    \_\_\_ strongly disagree

2. I am likely to study abroad in college.

\_\_\_ agree    \_\_\_ strongly agree    \_\_\_ disagree    \_\_\_ strongly disagree

3. I am likely to pursue a major with an international component.

\_\_\_ agree    \_\_\_ strongly agree    \_\_\_ disagree    \_\_\_ strongly disagree

4. I am more interested in learning about other cultures as a result of the trip.

\_\_\_ agree    \_\_\_ strongly agree    \_\_\_ disagree    \_\_\_ strongly disagree

5. I gained new interests as a result of the trip.

\_\_\_ agree    \_\_\_ strongly agree    \_\_\_ disagree    \_\_\_ strongly disagree

6. The service learning trip impacted my life in areas other than academics.

\_\_\_ agree    \_\_\_ strongly agree    \_\_\_ disagree    \_\_\_ strongly disagree



APPENDIX C  
POST-TRIP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Post Trip Interview Questions**

1. What was your favorite experience during this trip?
  - a. Why?
  - b. Can you describe it? Story that comes to mind?
2. What was your least favorite experience during this trip?
  - a. Why?
  - b. What did this particular experience represent for you? Story that comes to mind?
3. What was your motivation for going on this trip?
  - a. Did this trip meet your expectations? How so?
4. Were the preparation meetings you've had for the past year helpful? How so?
5. Did you attend any classes during the trip? If so, what did you think about them?
6. Has the trip influenced your intent to study abroad in college?
  - a. How so?
  - b. Are there any particular experiences or activities that made this impact?
7. Has the trip impacted your educational goals, as far as college majors or career goals are concerned?
  - a. How so?
8. Would you recommend this type of experience to other African American students?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. How was the experience being with a group of other African American students that you knew? Would you do it again with different group dynamics?
  - c. Did you experience/expect any racism/stereotypes?
9. Do you think that global education or international education travel is important?

a. Why?

b. Is your response based on this experience? How so?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Thank you so much for participating in this study.

APPENDIX D  
STUDENT CONSENT FORM

## STUDENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear JCP Senior,

Please accept this request to participate in a research study by Vankeila Simmons, a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago. You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Vankeila Simmons for a Master's Thesis under the supervision of Noah Sobe in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago because you participated in the Johnson College Prep Service Learning Trip to Ecuador over Spring Break. The thesis title is: The Influence of International Education Travel on African American High School Students' Intent to Study Abroad in College

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to ask African American high school students about their experiences with international education travel. The researcher will ask students questions about personal backgrounds and experiences from travel. The researcher will also ask questions previous travel experiences, attitudes and views before and after travel, as well as questions about how experiences may have impacted their intent to study abroad in college. The results will show the possible effects of exposure to international education travel on African American high school students.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in the study, you agree to:

- Complete a background information survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete.
- Participate in one interview about your service learning travel experience. The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes.
- Be audio recorded for the researcher to review the interviews and complete a partial transcription. By completing a partial transcription, the researcher will type any important parts of the dialogues from the interviews.

### **Risks/Benefits:**

Students participating in this study may experience some discomfort in discussing their backgrounds or personal experiences from travel.

The benefit of participating in this study is the students' interviews providing the researcher information to analyze how their experiences may increase African American student participation in study abroad programs. Additionally, students will be given the opportunity to fully discuss and process their experiences.

**Confidentiality:**

Students participating will be protected by the researcher during and after the interview. Participants will be given pseudonyms (fake names) in order to conceal their identity. Background surveys, audio recordings, interview notes and recordings will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to these items. They will be kept in her personal office, and discarded upon completion of research.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are not required to participate, and there are no penalties if you choose not to do so. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contact and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact the researcher, Vankeila Simmons, via email at vsimmons@luc.edu, or Noah Sobe at nsobe@luc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

Please check the boxes below to show your agreement to participate in each procedure. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in the research study. Please return this form to the researcher, Vankeila Simmons, in person or in my faculty mailbox in the main office. You will receive a copy of this form to keep for your records. Thank you for your consideration.

Complete a background information survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete.

Complete an educational goal survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete.

Participate in one audio recorded interview that will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

---

 Participant's Signature

---

 Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX E  
PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

**PARENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH  
(STUDENT UNDER AGE 18)**

Dear JCP Senior Parent/Guardian,

Please accept this request for your child's participation in a research study by Vankeila Simmons, a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago. Your consent is being sought on behalf of your student. Your child is being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Vankeila Simmons for a Master's Thesis under the supervision of Noah Sobe in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago because he/she participated in the Johnson College Prep Service Learning Trip to Ecuador over Spring Break. The thesis title is: The Influence of International Education Travel on African American High School Students' Intent to Study Abroad in College

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to ask African American high school students about their experiences with international education travel. The researcher will ask students questions about personal backgrounds and experiences from travel. The researcher will also ask questions about previous travel experiences, attitudes and views before and after travel, as well as questions about how experiences may have impacted their intent to study abroad in college. The results will show the possible effects of exposure to international education travel on African American high school students.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, you agree that your child will:

- Complete a background information survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete.
- Participate in one interview about your service learning travel experience. The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes.
- Be audio recorded for the researcher to review the interviews and complete a partial transcription. By completing a partial transcription, the researcher will type any important parts of the dialogues from the interviews.

**Risks/Benefits:**

Students participating in this study may experience some discomfort in discussing their backgrounds or personal experiences from travel.

The benefit of participating in this study is the students' interviews providing the researcher information to analyze how their experiences may increase African American student participation in study abroad programs. Additionally, students will be given the opportunity to fully discuss and process their experiences.



**Confidentiality:**

Students participating will be protected by the researcher during and after the interview. Participants will be given pseudonyms (fake names) in order to conceal their identity. Background surveys, audio recordings, interview notes and recordings will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to these items. They will be kept in her personal office, and discarded upon completion of research.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child is not required to participate, and there are no penalties if he/she chooses not to do so. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contact and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact the researcher, Vankeila Simmons, via email at vsimmons@luc.edu or Noah Sobe at nsobe@luc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

Please check the boxes below to show your agreement to allow your child to participate in each procedure. Your signature below indicates that you are providing consent on behalf of your child, have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to allow your child to participate in the research study. Please return this form to the researcher, Vankeila Simmons, in person or in my faculty mailbox in the main office. You will receive a copy of this form to keep for your records. Thank you for your consideration.

Complete a background information survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete.

Complete an educational goal survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete.

Participate in one audio recorded interview that will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

---

Guardian's Signature

---

Researcher's Signature

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ballentine, J.H. & Spade, J.Z. (2012). Understanding education through sociological theory In Ballentine, J.H. & Spade, J.Z. (Eds.), *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education* (pp. 13-29). London: SAGE Publications.
- Carlson, J.S., Burns, B.B., Useem, J., & Yachimowicz, D. (1990). *Study abroad: The experience of American undergraduates in Western Europe and the United States*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Dawson, N.J. (2000). Study abroad and African American college students at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. *African Issues*, 28(1/2), 124-129.
- Dessoff, A. (2006). Who's not going abroad? *International Educator*, 15(2), 20-27.
- Gillman, B. (2000). *The research interview*. London: Continuum.
- Gonyea, R.M. (2008, November). *The impact of study abroad on senior year engagement*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Jacksonville, FL.
- Institute of Education Sciences (2014). *National Center for Education Statistics*.  
<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>.
- Institute of Education Sciences (2014). U.S. study abroad student profile. Retrieved March, 5, 2014 from <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Student-Profile/2001-12#.UyFYrNz7MOA>.

Institute of International Education (2013). *Open doors report 2014*. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from <http://www.opendoors.iienetwork.org>.

Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2000). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln Commission. (2005). Global competence and national needs: One million Americans studying abroad. Final Report from the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship Program, Washington, DC.

McClellan, C. (2010). International education travel and youth of color: College is too late! *Education and Urban Society*, 43(2), 244-265.

Penn, E.B. & Tanner, J. (2009). Black students and international education: An assessment. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(2), 266-282.

Redden, E. (2007). Study abroad isn't just for white students. *Inside Higher Ed*. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/06/11/diversity>

Salisbury, M.H., Umbach, P.D., Paulsen, M.B., & Pascarella, E.T. (2009). Understanding the choice process of the intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(2), 119-143.

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## VITA

The author, Vankeila Simmons, was born in Tifton, GA on October 25, 1983. She attended the University of Virginia from 2002 to 2006 and received a Bachelor of Arts in English and African and African American Studies in 2006. Vankeila attended Georgia State University from 2008 to 2010 and received a Master of Public Policy in 2010. She began work towards a Master of Arts in Cultural and Education Policy Studies at Loyola University Chicago in the Fall of 2012.