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FACTORS IN DESTINATION DECISIONS FOR CUBAN STUDY ABROAD

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

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who helped me write this thesis, starting with the faculty members on my thesis committee Dr. Noah Sobe and Dr. Terry Williams. I would also like to thank my friends and family who helped motivate me and keep me focused when all I wanted to do was give up.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2011, the Obama Administration loosened the regulations on academic travel to Cuba, allowing students to travel to this island nation as part of an academic program. These changes have created an ideal environment in which to study the factors that influence the institutional decision to create a new study abroad program. Cuba, unlike most other countries that might be viable for an academic exchange program, has not been widely available for travel since study abroad became a common feature on U.S. campuses. One of the first communities to make use of this previously unavailable opportunity is higher education. Many colleges and universities have already taken advantage of the opportunity to send students to Cuba and study a new society and culture. However, the question remains, why Cuba?

Cuban study abroad programs create a unique opportunity to study what factors contribute to the institutional decision to create a new study abroad program. This is an area that has seen very little if any previous research, allowing for many questions to be asked and investigated. However, this study hopes to investigate the connection between the goals of education abroad as a whole and the reasons a study abroad program, in this case to Cuba, is actually created. Studying the decision making process behind these Cuban exchange programs will inform not only study abroad within that country but possibly the main factors influencing study abroad as a whole.
The four main factors found in the literature were the desire of institutions to create global citizens, use new programs to attract new students and compete with other educational institutions, create globally competitive graduates, and forge new institutional relationships abroad. However, none but the purpose of creating globally competent citizens turned out to be true motivating factors when interviewing the six faculty and study abroad administrators of Cuban study abroad programs at five different institutions around the U.S. The development of new study abroad programs turned out to be much less guided by these overarching institutional goals than by the interests and involvement of the individual faculty members leading them.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Unfortunately, there is a surprising lack of scholarly work surrounding the institutional motivations to create a study abroad program in a specific location. Indeed, extensive searching produced no articles or studies on the factors that influence the institution’s decision-making process. Therefore, the review of the available literature had to be taken one step back to the motivations of higher education institutions to offer any study abroad programs in the first place, not just to a particular destination. It should be noted that this thesis does not attempt to explain why the students themselves wish to study abroad, although a great deal on that topic has been written, but rather why their higher education institutions want them to, which is less investigated. Research on this topic was again light but, upon closer inspection, seemed to be part of a larger discussion on the internationalization of American higher education. I have divided this research thematically to systematically compare the various viewpoints on campus internationalization in general and the creation of global citizens, student marketability in the international job market, prestige afforded to the university, and as a way to forge relationships with other foreign institutions in particular. These thematic divisions will further inform my analysis later in this study.

Internationalization came up again and again as the main reason for endorsing study abroad on campus. Many cite the numerous government and privately funded
studies calling for the internationalization of higher education as the impetus behind the proliferation of study abroad in American colleges and universities. In her article “Challenges and Opportunities for the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Coming Decade: Planned and Opportunistic Initiatives in American Institutions”, Jane Edwards (2007) found this common thread as far back as the U.S. President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies in 1979 thru reports from the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) in 1988 all the way up to the 2002 American Council on Education report and the 2005 Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. Bartell (2003) views internationalization as a campus wide process that must include international faculty involvement, accessible study abroad options, international student involvement and international co-curricular units. All of the literature reviewed acknowledged that study abroad alone would not be enough to internationalize a campus, however some questioned its overall effectiveness. Brookes and Becket (2010) note study abroad’s traditional role in this internationalizing trend, but question its ability to effect any real change on the campus as a whole. However, it is not the focus of this study to evaluate the claim that study abroad internationalizes a campus, rather to understand the motivations behind the desire to internationalize and, by extension, to offer study abroad. Effectiveness often has no bearing on the initial motive or reason behind a particular action, although the actual outcomes of study abroad for students are a hotly debated subject within the international education community and still bear more investigation.
The main causes of this movement to internationalize fall into two categories: the creation of global citizens and the creation of competitive candidates for the international job market. In her article “Education and the Contested Meanings of Global Citizenship”, Leslie Roman (2003) analyzes the concept of the global citizen in relation to education and the responsibility of the American higher education system to produce such globally savvy graduates. It is a duty of the citizen to the state to become globally minded. She writes, “global intelligence requires the development of a moral imagination to view the world through the other’s eye, and a commitment to build cultural bridges across regimes of fear and suspicion” (p. 282). Indeed, Brookes and Becket (2010) also define this goal of internationalization as a “civic” responsibility (p. 376). However, Roman (2003) goes on to call this process intellectual tourism and describes it as an “attempt to achieve ‘cultural immersion’ for the sake of promoting diversity and understanding through cultural exposure, a somewhat less positive viewpoint (p. 272). Indeed, Bartell (2003) might argue that study abroad is not the ideal way to achieve this much-desired global citizen described by Roman (2003). Again, it is not within the scope of this study to determine if study abroad indeed creates global citizens, but it should certainly be noted that this is a common explanation for the development and encouragement of education abroad programs.

A large proportion of authors cited the development of globally competitive job seekers as the larger reason for internationalization on campus, and hopefully a result of study abroad. However, some viewed it as a responsibility the institution owed to its students and others as a responsibility to the state. Both viewpoints are valid, but come
from very different conceptions of higher education and whom it serves. Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) view this internationalization as a response to job market demand for globally competent candidates. They present internationalization as a responsibility to the students to prepare them for employment after graduation. “The need to internationalize …[was a] response to an economically driven market and its effort to graduate [a] globally competent …workforce” (p. 459). Similarly, Brookes and Becket (2010) present compelling statistics showing the preference for globally prepared graduates by employers. Both authors allude to the responsibility of the university to adequately adjust to these new employer demands and produce graduates with the proper skills. However, Brunstein (2007) links both global citizenship with workplace readiness by saying “Without global competence our students will be ill-prepared for global citizenship, lacking the skills required to address our national security needs, and unable to compete successfully in the global market” (p. 382). Indeed these two concepts are intimately linked, but authors like Bartell (2003) seem to focus almost exclusively on the larger national implications of a globally incompetent workforce. In his article “Internationalization of Universities: A University Culture-Based Framework”, he asserts that having a well prepared global workforce “has become critical to our cultural, technological, economic and political health” (p. 49).

Not only is it important for graduates to be competitive, but this capitalistic construct also applies to the universities that hope to internationalize their students. This is a separate, but often related, portion of the literature in that it provides another motivation for universities to internationalize and support study abroad. No author denied
that study abroad could impact the competitive rank of institutions of higher learning, but only a few addressed it at some length. For example, Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) simply allude to these issues with the assertion that universities are competitively driven and must compete in the global market the same as any for-profit enterprise. In similarly non-ideological terms, Philip Altbach and Jane Kight (2007) describe “international higher education as a commodity to be freely traded and sees higher education as a private good, not a public responsibility,” again echoing the discussion above on global citizenship and workplace preparedness (p. 291). They later go on to say that universities, as fiscally driven service providers, use international programs to attract students and aid in recruitment. However, Roman (2003) presents internationalization as a vehicle for the cultural capital of international experiences. She characterizes international experiences, like study abroad, in terms of a “global marketplace in which cultural practices are mere commodities…bought and sold in exchange for particular cultural capital” (p. 276). And, although she does not explicitly make this argument, I would put forth that the ‘prestige’ associated with those experiences is indirectly transferred to the school itself. She is the only author to call this prestige cultural capital, and it would be an interesting line of research to see if different types of abroad experiences carry differing amounts of cultural capital. Sporn (1996) also asserts that universities are vulnerable to their environments, but not with the same detail or cultural explanations as Roman. Bartell (2003) even mentions the usefulness of international experience in differentiating the social elites from the rest of society, leaving the reader to infer that the larger number and types of international experiences a university offers, the more elite it will seem. Edwards
(2007) even more explicitly describes the competition for students, faculty, and research funding that today’s universities face and the conclusion that internationalization “can be seen as a strategic response to an analysis of market factors in this globalized age” (p. 379).

Finally, research showed that an additional motivation to support study abroad as part of campus-wide internationalization efforts is the ability to forge new and lasting relationships with foreign institutions. Altbach and Knight (2007) assert that even if an international program is not financially successful, it may still enhance the “competitiveness and prestige [through] strategic alliances of colleges” (p. 293). Similarly Brookes and Becket (2010) assert that fostering these international partnerships and alliances is the ultimate goal of internationalization in that it can then become a self-sustaining and deeper relationship with the global world. These partnerships were also cited as a way for internationalization efforts to benefit the academic goals of the university. Brookes and Becket comment that these international alliances can help in attracting international faculty and subsequently an opportunity to participate in research projects abroad. They also allude to the fact that the academic benefits of traveling with a faculty member and participating in hands-on work are a huge benefit of study abroad.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS

In order to identify potential participants I used a variety of methods, as there is no definitive list of universities operating or planning to operate a study abroad program to Cuba. I started by investigating the University of Buffalo SECUSSA-L listserv archives and identifying those posts announcing new Cuba study abroad programs since January of 2011. As this listserv is an industry wide posting site for new programs, it is almost certain that any new programs would be announced here.

The date of January 2011 is significant as that is when the Obama Administration loosened the restrictions on academic travel to Cuba that, once again, made it easier for universities to set up their own programs. Additionally, since this was a relatively recent occurrence, there is a better chance of finding the person or people initially involved in the development of these Cuban study abroad programs. The earlier the program was started the more likely it would be that the founders would have moved to another university, another position, or retired completely. Initially, I planned to use this date as a boundary for my interview, not including any programs started before 2011. However, as my research progressed I found that many of the schools announcing new programs had also run programs to Cuba previous to 2003 when the Bush Administration tightened the restrictions. This made the 2011 date rather meaningless and so I chose to focus on all currently running programs, rather than those initiated in the last two years.
With the 2011 boundary removed, I also searched www.studyabroad.com for schools advertising a program in Cuba. This site is a search engine often used by students to find programs that fit their criteria and so it was very helpful in identifying those that fit my research criteria as well. After compiling a list of over twenty-five possible institutions, I visited each school’s website for information on their program. By double-checking the search engine results, I was able to eliminate those postings that were out of date. Some schools no longer had their advertised Cuba program and some had no program at all that I could find.

I also used my contacts within the field to identify faculty members or administrators who were planning to start a Cuba program. This also included anecdotal evidence from the study participants. As the field of international education is relatively small, it is very common for study abroad offices or faculty members to reach out to colleagues at other schools for advice and guidance and so it is often a good way to gather information that might not be general knowledge yet.

Of the original twenty-five, I then contacted fifteen colleges and universities to identify the key administrators and faculty members involved with the creation and implementation of the new program. Each university is different, so the specific individuals might vary from school to school but I attempted to speak with each involved individual who was available to be interviewed. In all instances, there turned out to be only one individual who initiated and developed the program, with others helping in a limited capacity only. I was able to obtain seven interviews. One had to be thrown out due to lack of recording quality, leaving 6 total contributing to the data. I also reached out
to private third party providers in an effort to gain deeper insight into the decisions of universities, however I later chose to omit that portion of the research in an effort to focus the study. However, I do include a few relevant examples as illustrations of the central points of this study when the third party representative was referencing direct experiences with university faculty rather than their opinion as a third party study abroad provider.

I contacted each school by phone whenever possible or by e-mail when a phone conversation was not possible. After obtaining an initial consent to participate in the study, I sent each participant an e-mail detailing the study, any potential risks, and contact information for myself and my advisor should they have any additional questions. Each then responded that they accepted the terms of the study and agreed to participate.

Most interviews were conducted over Skype or the telephone due to geographic distance. However, two were conducted in person. Each interview was recorded and transcribed to facilitate future analysis. They were semi-structured and the interview questions were designed to be open ended and allow each participant to speak at length about the development of their program. The interview questions were grouped into three main areas, the importance of study abroad in general, the relationship between study abroad, Cuban study abroad and the mission of the school, and the details of the development and reasoning behind the Cuba program specifically.

After the interviews were complete I analyzed the transcripts along four thematic lines: producing global citizens, developing strong competitors in the global job market, university marketability, and institutional international outreach. I then looked at these
themes in the context of each interview and the previous literature on the internationalization of campuses.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

When starting this project, the lack of other research on the subject of university
decision making in regards to study abroad was very surprising. There were so many
questions to be answered and addressed. In an effort to narrow the very broad field this
left open, I decided to use Cuba as a case study given the very recent relaxing of federal
restrictions on academic travel in January 2011 and the interesting flurry of new faculty
led programs this created in the field of international education. I asked, what factors
drove U.S. higher education institutions to create new Cuban study abroad programs, and
is there a connection between the goals and motivations to offer study abroad and the
eventual decision to create a specific offering in Cuba? I sought to understand how these
motivations relate, or not, to the factors that caused these higher education institutions to
offer study abroad in general.

I contacted fifteen institutions resulting in six interviews from five universities
and colleges. While there is no guarantee that six out of fifteen is a representative sample,
I feel confident based on the diversity of the institutions that did agree to be interviewed
that these results are not unduly biased towards one type of institution or program. The
participating institutions range in size, location, funding source, religious affiliation, and
type and length of Cuban study abroad program offered. Appendix A presents these
characteristics as well as the identifying name given to each institution in this text.
Anecdotally, it was interesting to find a number of Cuban study abroad programs at institutions that had religious affiliations, three out of five were religiously affiliated. However, only half of the participants were from religiously affiliated institutions since two faculty members were from the same non-religious university. This could be a partial explanation for the presence of service learning in the interviews with these institutions but on the whole, many of the institutions I contacted were religiously affiliated. The brief mentions of third party providers in these findings were from interviews with the directors of customized programing, one at a Midwestern company, one on the East Coast, and one in the Southwest. These examples were only in reference to the comments or actions of a university faculty member, and serve to elucidate a point rather than speaking to the views of the third party representative.

I expected to find that the motivations of universities closely mirrored what would be expected after a review of the available literature on the topic. The four areas I identified in the literature were to create global citizens, prepare students for the global work force, add to the prestige of the university, and enable further international relationships with other institutions abroad. However the reality turned out to be much more nuanced than the clear correlation I expected. With this study I aim to show that the main drivers of the creation of new Cuban study abroad programs were the practical availability of a faculty member with both interest and experience in Cuba as well as that faculty member’s interest in providing students with a unique international learning experience, in many ways relating to the creation of global citizens.
One of the first trends I found in my interviews was the dependence on faculty members to initiate and champion new study abroad programs. Even though this was not part of my initial research question, I feel it is important enough to include in my findings since this one factor, more than anything else, impacts how study abroad destination decisions are made. The fact that an individual person’s interests are the driving force behind these new Cuba programs means that broader conceptual assessments of a location’s impact on the university as a whole are largely overlooked in preference to the practicality of having a motivated and experienced person to run any new program. Five out of six of the schools interviewed had programs that were purely faculty initiated and the sixth would not have gotten off the ground if a motivated faculty member hadn’t come forward to lead it. When asked how the programs began, the administrators and faculty members made comments like, “I became really committed to educating people about Cuba and so I really pushed as hard as I could to get an overseas study program in Cuba… this particular president thought it was a good idea and basically she let me do it” (Faculty Director at Small East Coast College) and “I said ‘I have to start this program’. So [the approving administrator] said well go ahead, you have the experience so no problem” (Fine Arts Faculty Director at Large Public University). It seemed evident very quickly that while schools may have encouraged faculty members to take students abroad, the choice of destination and type of program were almost entirely up to the faculty member. “I mean they wanted that I would take the students out of the country in an international experience. It was more my personal choice to decide to do it to Cuba”
Faculty interests seemed to be the most important factor influencing the choice of Cuba.

The one outlier indicated that they “were actually receiving incredible interest from students...We put out a call for a faculty member to run it [and] she designed and created this…course” (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University). This particular university relied on an experienced faculty member to create and run the course. While it might have been initiated due to student interest, the program itself could not have been made into a reality if a willing faculty member had not been found. The experience, knowledge, and in many cases outright force of will were essential to the creation of these programs. Every single Cuba program in this study was initiated by someone who not only had studied Cuba in depth but also who had traveled there and in five out of six cases had run a Cuba study abroad program previous to the tightening of travel restrictions by the Bush Administration in 2003.

However, when one looks at the amount of work involved in creating a study abroad program it makes sense that only those programs that had a dedicated faculty leader would come to fruition. In the words of one participant, “I’m only one person trying to organize this…I’m doing the teaching, I’m doing the programing, I’m doing the publicity, I do everything myself because I enjoy it” (Fine Arts Faculty Director at Large Public University). This creates a situation where universities are not thinking strategically about what their students need, but rather relying on the interests of their faculty members. Creation of programs is not decided by demand, rather by the supply of adequately knowledgeable and willing faculty members. This immediately throws into
question the efforts of universities to internationalize their campuses, is it really a strategic well thought out plan, or more of an organic development with little control by the university administration? This, of course is a question for another study but it does lessen the potential impact of institutional goals like developing global citizens or increasing global workplace readiness from individual study abroad programs.

This being said, there was an interesting side note that came up in both a university and third party interview that could speak to the university’s ability to increase its control over the location of future study abroad programs, and that is to encourage faculty members to travel to destinations deemed desirable by the university administration. As one provider said, “it’s not just about sending students, it’s about students and faculty bringing something back. And then they share their experience with their other faculty and it just snowballs from there” (Third Party Provider in the Southwest). One faculty member who had recently visited the island described a group of faculty members from another university, who had just traveled to Cuba for workshops at the University of Havana,

Now that is an idea right there. Because, by having the faculty go and learn about the island, when they come back what is it that they do? They include Cuba in their respective syllabi, which then informs the students, which then fuels the study abroad program. Fantastic move! (Latin American Studies Faculty Director at Large Public University)

Perhaps by informing the faculty members, a university can more effectively influence the creation of study abroad programs to strategically beneficial locations. However, this underscores the importance of faculty interest in the creation of study abroad programs to new destinations.
As discussed earlier, it was surprising not to find the themes discussed in most of the literature immediately assert themselves in the interviews. However, one that did prove true was the desire to transform their students into global citizens. Now, it is true that not many actually used the words ‘global citizen’, but there was certainly a common commitment to providing students with a unique experience abroad that would enable them to gain more cultural understanding of the world around them. While not all experts agree on the definition of a global citizen, one shared principle is that a global citizen is someone who has “global intelligence” and knowledge about the world (Roman, 2003). All participants discussed this goal in general terms related to their reasons for wanting to develop a study abroad program. One described the experience as a way to further his ability to educate students saying, “I mean we cannot be cocoons, we cannot be islands. We’re talking about the globalized world…[study abroad is] a much needed and welcome tool in our arsenal as educators” (Latin American Studies Faculty Director at Large Public University). Many were frustrated with the state of American students’ cultural understanding, describing students as “very provincial, without much knowledge of the world” (Faculty Director at Small East Coast College) and stating, “They don’t know anything about the world” (Fine Arts Faculty Director at Large Public University). As one participant asked, “certainly with the 21st century and global citizenship being a major call for universities, how do we prepare our students politically, socially, culturally, linguistically, economically for the new reality of that globalization” (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University)? At least for these participants, study abroad was the answer and Cuba was the destination of choice.
Cuba stood out as a destination that would quickly and irrevocably change the way their students viewed and thought about the world. As one very passionate faculty member explained,

Cuba for most people absolutely transforms them…not in terms of poverty but in terms of everything, in terms of a social system that’s completely different, an economic system that’s completely different, a political system that’s totally different, culturally that’s vibrant and free. That’s what we hope to have them have and experience. (Faculty Director at Small East Coast College)

Cuba seemed to have a unique value all its own. One faculty member explained, “we don’t actually seek to fulfill a requirement…it’s a mind opening experience, it’s an experience more than anything else” (Faculty Director at Small Private University). The program was developed solely for the cultural benefits Cuba could offer. Of course, for a Latin American Studies or Spanish faculty, Cuba presents a topically significant location. “Cuba is central to understanding the region [it had a huge impact] and continues to have in the world, again primarily between the United States and the rest of the region” (Latin American Studies Faculty Director at Large Public University). In this faculty’s view, enabling students to see such an important keystone of Latin American politics is paramount to understanding the region as a whole, and to understand that means, “you will be an educated person, you will understand reality better. You will become a better global citizen.” Education in and of itself is the reason for travel.

As discussed in the literature, global citizenship brings a “civic” responsibility to reach out to others and educate oneself about the world (Brookes & Becket, 2010). This is a similar conception of national citizenship, to be a citizen means to be responsible for educating oneself and understanding the nation to which the citizen belongs, at least at a
basic level (U.S Department of State, 2007). Therefore it follows that to be global citizen, one must educate himself or herself about the world and all the peoples that inhabit it. This has created a problem in regards to Cuba since, for the better part of sixty years, Cuba was explicitly off limits for American citizens. So, for those academics dedicated to true cultural understanding and the development of global citizens, Cuba is a wonderful opportunity to educate students about a part of the world that they would never be able to see on their own. Every single participant brought up the exotic forbidden fruit element inherent in Cuban study abroad programs and cited it as a large reason why they chose Cuba. However, it is still unresolved as to whether this came solely from the desire to explore a new destination or as a result of the ethos of American independence and legacy of challenging established beliefs within American academia.

Of course, it is natural that students and faculty alike would be curious about the mysterious island to the south. I am sure that the increase in Cuban study abroad programs has human nature to thank for its upswing in the number of programs being offered. Every participant spoke about the curiosity and excitement Cuba evoked as a result of travel being illegal for so long. One faculty director explained his desire to offer students this unique opportunity by saying,

For me, Cuba I just wanted to take the opportunity to do it, because it was something that had not been forbidden in U.S. law until the late 70’s and so I just wanted to take advantage of that and see a place that you couldn’t go on your own. (Faculty Director at Small Private University)

This is a ‘strike while the iron is hot’ mentality. There was also the sentiment that creating a program to Cuba would make it easy to recruit students for the program, because of the student’s interest in the country.
Our students…are academically extremely bright, inquisitive, creative students and I think that Cuba because of the sanctions, has always had this, you know there are very few places in the world that US citizens are not allowed to travel to. So of course that creates an interest in going to someplace that other people are not able to go. (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University)

Cuba presented a destination that was not only exciting to students but also interesting academically because of the lack of information students have about it. As one administrator put it, “we have this really fascinating island that is 90 miles south of Miami and it’s one of our archenemies and we know nothing about it… it’s the unknown, it’s the sexiness of study abroad” (Faculty Director at Small Southern University). It is interesting that this particular participant described Cuba as an archenemy, since this also played into the reasons many wanted to create Cuban study abroad programs.

Many participants expressed a desire to inform students about Cuba so that generally held beliefs and prejudices could be challenged. Indeed, as Leslie Roman asserts in her article “Education and the Contested Meanings of Global Citizenship”, being a global citizen means having a “commitment to build cultural bridges across regimes of fear and suspicion” (Roman, 2003, p. 282). Mistrust and unfounded prejudice are the opposite of what it means to be a good global citizen. Indeed, one participant noted that cutting off routes to dispelling that suspicion “is the antithesis of what a university is all about” (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University). Cuba offers university faculty the opportunity to debunk common stereotypes and assumptions about the country and its inhabitants. “In the case of Cuba more than others, it’s to challenge stereotypes... because of the way Cuba is often portrayed in the American media…so I think that’s why the Cuba experience is particularly important, to have those stereotypes
challenged” (Faculty Director at Small Private University). Cuba offers a real opportunity for these faculty members to inform and teach young people in a meaningful way, which is ostensibly why they went into education in the first place: to educate. However, some interviews also had a touch of a defiant undercurrent in that they wanted to challenge U.S. government policy. For example, one faculty member explained,

> I felt like Cuba, more than anywhere else almost, could offer the students a chance to see how a country which has been portrayed as an enemy, how it’s not really an enemy…and that we should not be making their lives more difficult but rather we should be acting in a neighborly fashion to all the peoples of the world. (Faculty Director at Small East Coast College)

The statement bespeaks not only disagreement with long standing government policy, but also a desire to move towards peaceful relationships with Cuba, something which no one is sure will ever happen. In essence, this faculty member is saying she wants to educate students to question the policy of their government, to make their own assessment. This independence and freedom to think and speak against the government are a uniquely American ideal, where the Freedom of Speech is such a prized right. The choice of Cuba for a study abroad program, in part, comes from the value of individuality and ability of the higher education system to impart knowledge that might be against what the university or the government might want. Cuban study abroad programs are an example of academic freedom in action. However, some took this a step further and stated outright that they wanted to take students to Cuba simply because they didn’t like the government telling them what to do. One participant who currently works for a third party provider on the East Coast described the reaction she got from a group of faculty members in Cuba after asking them why they wanted to start a program there, “I would say half of the
group, their response was ‘because I don’t want my government telling me where I can and can’t travel’. Which I thought was so interesting because it had nothing to do with academics.” More than anything else I think this is an example of the importance of individual faculty members initiating study abroad programs, that there is really no way for the university to control the destination decision process.

However, recognition of the antagonistic and sparse relationship between the United States and Cuba inevitably brings with it the idea of the ‘other’ (Said, 1978). But it was surprising that it specifically showed up a number of times in the interviews. Four of the 6 participants described Cuba as the ‘other’, which was not always a completely flattering association. Most used it simply as a reference to the cultural difference and mystery that Cubans possess in the American psyche, “Cuba represents more than any other country perhaps in the world, the “other”. [It’s the] most intriguing way to show students that the enemy, or the adversary if you want to put it that way, are people just like us” (Faculty Director at Small East Coast College). In this instance the term ‘other’ is used as a way to highlight the imagined difference between the two cultures in order to make the point that these are in fact only imagined. Indeed, one faculty member pointed out that, “To go abroad is not only to understand the “other” but also to understand yourself, and that’s a hell of a nice lesson… for our students to understand somebody else’s humanity” (Latin American Studies Faculty Director at Large Public University). To show students the humanity they shared with these people who are thought of as so mysterious is a lesson many participants hoped to teach to their students, and a specific reason they chose such a unique destination as Cuba.
It’s so close and yet we know nothing about it, this really opens our eyes about the value and importance of interacting with other human beings and seeing that our ideology may be different but bottom line, we are humans and we are working towards the same thing (Faculty Director at Small Southern University).

Indeed, Roman (2003) stresses that true global citizenship “requires the development of a moral imagination to view the world through the other’s eye” (p. 282). One participant took the concept of the ‘other’ a step further and combined it with the opportunity to serve, “at the heart and soul of [our] mission…is service to the ‘other.’ The opportunity to engage with the ‘other’ in an authentic truly beneficial exchange, that’s transformative and inspirational for our students” (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University).

However, there is a fine line between empathy for a shared human condition and pity for the plights of the less fortunate ‘other’. I think this distinction is made difficult when ‘other’ is used to describe those in need, highlighting the fact that those in need are different, set apart from and usually on a lower level than oneself.

The number of interviews where service learning came up as a reason for choosing Cuba as a destination was also unexpected given its relative unimportance in the literature. Half cited service learning options as one of the reasons they settled on Cuba as the destination for their study abroad program. However, given the many above ways global citizenship was cited as a reason for selecting Cuba, it makes sense that faculty members would want to plan programs that enable students to put those new cultural skills to use and engage with the global community. Also, a commitment to service learning is a new trend in the field of international education, as one participant explained,
I think because of the real interest in Latin American studies here on campus, and because of a real affinity for service, Cuba makes perfect sense for a university of our size and our mission. It’s really important that we give our students these opportunities to study and engage in service learning opportunities and internships in an overseas setting. I mean, you can’t imagine a university that is looking at its mission in the 21st century that is not going to be globally engaged. (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University)

Service abroad is a tangible way faculty directors can ensure real world engagement with the local culture and society, which would be especially important if they decided to travel to Cuba to help challenge stereotypes and inform a new conception of Cuban nationals. Service learning is seen as the cutting edge of study abroad programing, “I think we need to push it to the next level…developing areas of service learning and really engaging our students into a community overseas that really get their hands dirty” (Faculty Director at Small Southern University). Global citizenship embodies the ideals of cultural understanding and recognizing the humanity of all people. So it follows that those truly interested in growing global citizens, as these participants are, would have a desire to visit a place open to service projects and in need of additional support.

While added promotional advantage is often cited as reason to promote study abroad on campus, in actuality it proved to have very little impact in the creation process of the actual study abroad programs. The potential marketing benefit of a Cuba study abroad program did not come up in any of the interviews as the main reason why the program was created although it was mentioned as a benefit. When prompted, some did express that the program could be beneficial and that contributed to the ease of approval. The faculty director from a university with a reputation for an excellent study abroad program explained,
Yea the administration is very proud of that, so when a faculty takes the initiative...to create a Cuba course, they’re very supportive because of the broader picture...it’s one of the very definite ways that we attract students to [our] university, is our international studies abroad program. (Faculty Director at Small Private University)

The broader picture of the institution’s international education program was the focus of the university’s marketing efforts, not any program in particular. The marketing potential was more of an administrative reason to approve and possibly subsidize a program, rather than a reason to develop it in the first place. This is an important distinction and one that I think is sometimes lost in the research on internationalization. It is easy to come up with beneficial side effects of any initiative after it has been created, however, it is much more difficult to separate that hindsight with the factors that actually went into the decision when it was being made. If faculty members are the ones initiating these programs, what motivations are more important, those of the faculty starting the program or those of the administrator approving it? For example, after many years of failing to recruit enough students, one institution had to decide to continue to offer it or to cancel the program. The institution decided to continue running it because, in the words of the director, “in this very competitive market of recruiting prospective students to the university, I think that having a Cuba program does put us a little bit ahead in terms of ‘oh Cuba, that’s interesting’” (Faculty Director at Small Southern University). Cuba’s value was that it could catch the attention of potential freshman, but this was a consideration in the initial creation. In this particular case, the interview was conducted with the current director of the international office and acting director for the program as the original faculty member had retired. The faculty member who pushed for its creation was deeply intrigued by
Cuba on an ideological level and wanted to teach students about the communist ideal, something that on the whole would not be very marketable to the general student population. There was a disconnect between what the institution saw as valuable and what the faculty director saw as valuable, and in this case they did not align very well. So in that situation, which ideal wins out? It is an intriguing question and one that speaks to the true effectiveness of the many benefits of study abroad. This is not to say that study abroad doesn’t have benefits or goals, just that they might be something entirely different from what the university or international education academic might think.

However, the somewhat related aspect of competition did come up in several conversations, although not specifically tied to the idea of institutional promotion but rather a desire to take advantage of an opportunity. As one faculty member put it, one does not want to be “the one who falls asleep and loses an opportunity… I mean it would be a lost opportunity not to develop something in Cuba when the possibilities are now there” (Latin American Studies Faculty Director at Large Public University). This could of course be explained in a promotional light, wanting to offer a unique service that no one else had in order to increase enrollment, (i.e. differentiation of the product). However, it seemed to be more a feeling of trying to take advantage of a chance to do something different, while it was still on the cutting edge. One veteran faculty director admitted that, “once people to people travel [non-academic travel open to the general population] starts to get ramped up it does take away the uniqueness of the experience” (Faculty Director at Small Private University). Could this sense of urgency be a result of academic curiosity about the unknown discussed earlier rather than a capitalistic
calculation? Of course it is possible that is has a little of both. But academia has always been fueled by the desire to explore new frontiers, why not have that extend to study abroad destinations as well? Again, there is a difference behind the stated goals and benefits and the real driving force behind those goals. I seek not to invalidate those benefits, rather to expose them for what they are, an extra incentive to the real mission of growing global citizens expressed by the faculty.

Overall, Cuban study abroad was given somewhat lackluster endorsement as a resume builder. Especially given the lack of economic relations between Cuba and the U.S. Not a single participant cited job preparedness as a reason he or she started the Cuba program. Some outright denied that it had any value at all saying, “No, no to be honest there, I mean overall I don’t think a one-week study abroad program is that much of a resume builder…[it] is a weak argument” (Faculty Director at Small Private University). They blamed the length of the program, but obviously it wasn’t intended to be a resume builder if that is how he designed it. Another participant admitted that he hadn’t even considered it,

You know to be totally honest I haven’t even thought of the business aspect for students. How could this impact you positively in your pocket long term, it hasn’t even entered my mind. You do this because you will profit as a person. (Latin American Studies Faculty Director at Large Public University)

Potential future gain was almost approached with an air of disdain. Overarchingly it was the cultural and personal lessons that were the real benefits, not the possibility of future jobs skills. Although again, there is a disconnect between the reasons study abroad is important, and the reasons programs are developed. Cultural understanding might serve a student well when interviewing for, or more probably, performing in the workplace, but
that is not the reason it is important. It is an unintended consequence, if it benefits graduates at all. More and more studies are showing only modest benefits from study abroad when alumni enter the workforce, at least in terms of hiring. “While CEOs express their conviction that international competence is important, that view is not shared by campus recruiters and is not being reflected in hiring and promotions” (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2007). Now again, this is not to say that study abroad does not provide usable skills in the workplace, merely that the studies done so far are not producing the mind boggling positive results one would expect from the number of times job skills are mentioned in the average study abroad brochure. This is a common endorsement of study abroad when trying to convince dubious students and financially strapped parents to pay for the extra expense. And it does sound very good, and might in an indirect way be very valuable, but as of yet there is not much hard evidence to prove it. The benefits to employability are subjective, and speak more to the benefits of being a culturally knowledgeable global citizen than to actually having gained a definable skill while abroad, which is admittedly very hard to test. Indeed, the benefits of study abroad are, in the words of one administrator,

In the essence of understanding another culture, in the essence of flexibility, adaptability that just helps students…when [they] go and get a real job or go out in the real world, whether that means that we have certain skill sets. Study abroad is just such an important part of higher education. (Faculty Director at Small Southern University)

Things like flexibility and adaptability are very useful, but often don’t come up or show up during a job interview. The true aim of the program is to produce a good global citizen. Workforce skills are a welcome side effect and not a determining factor in the
choice to create a study abroad program to Cuba. Especially given the fact that familiarity with the Cuban culture cannot directly impact a graduate’s ability to work overseas or for a multi national company since there is no commerce between the United States and Cuba. Familiarity with Cuban culture is a broad benefit to students, rather than specific instruction about a culture they are likely to encounter on the job.

The final and possibly least mentioned benefit to having study abroad on campus was the ability for institutions to forge new relationships with other higher education institutions abroad. Again, while it may be a side effect, it was in no way the reason behind choosing Cuba as a study abroad destination. Not a single participant said they wanted to forge a relationship with the University of Havana and so they decided to start a student program there. Not one. However, all spoke about the necessity to create ties with the University of Havana as a way to get their program started. These ties were a means to an end, as one third party provider participant in the Midwest pointed out, the “University of Havana is really the only game in town.” Currently the Cuban government encourages all new study abroad programs to go through the University of Havana, and so a relationship with them is a basic logistical hurdle. However, similar to the promotional benefits of study abroad, institutional relationships with the University of Havana were a reason to continue a failing program and/or a means to save it. One institution cited its “really good, active relationship with the University of Havana” (Faculty Director at Small Southern University) as one of the reasons to continue its struggling program. Additionally, another participant decided to reach out to the university to create, “a more long-term sustainable relationship on multiple levels,
including short-term programs in the future” (Study Abroad Director at Large Private University) because of a shared religious affiliation. However, it should be noted that this desire to create more lasting ties came only after the initial program was proposed and subsequently failed to fill. It was not part of the initial reason to develop the program, rather a way to improve it and make it viable in the future. International institutional relationships did not appear to be a factor at all in the decision to start a program in Cuba, rather a necessary step in the process to create and sustain it.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Of course there are many ways to interpret these findings, especially in the light of so little prior research, but in my opinion three main conclusions stood out. The first has to do with the situation that initially prompted this study, as that is the lack of previous investigation on the topic of study abroad program creation. This in and of itself was such a large hole in the existing literature that I feel it is important to note its possible consequences. So much attention is given to the question of student choice and decision-making, that no one seems to have focused on that of the faculty and administrators behind these programs, without whom these programs would not exist. Shouldn’t the how and why of program creation be just as important as the how and why of student choice? Knowing more about the factors influencing a program’s creation can only lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the students who eventually choose to go on it. It will shed light on the real goals and objectives of these programs and perhaps bring some much-needed truth to the international education community as to what it is really achieving and why it is really important. How can anyone understand the impact of something, if they do not know where it comes from? It is like joining a protest because you see one sign that you agree with, only to find out that the real meaning behind the movement is something very different, something that you may or may not agree with or wish to support. This situation calls out for much more additional research.
in order to truly understand the factors that influence the creation of a new study abroad program. How else can university administrators or international education professionals be truly sure of what their programs are advocating? It leaves too much room for universities to be supporting programs that do not work towards their stated mission, values, and goals. Now, it can be asked how closely do universities want to micromanage every detail of their study abroad, but at least it would be better for university leadership to be working from a place of knowledge and reality instead of idealism and hope. If institutions want to give carte blanche to their faculty to encourage diversity and test out new ideas, then by all means, but they should not do so thinking that this is the most efficient way to internationalize their campus.

This relates directly to the second conclusion that immediately asserted itself, that of the importance of faculty in the creation of new study abroad programs. As this study shows, faculty interest and investment were absolutely essential for the creation of a successful university run study abroad program. Faculty interests, aims, passion, and knowledge drive the content and formation of these programs and subsequently have a huge impact on overall student engagement and satisfaction. Now of course, this study only covers the development of Cuban study abroad programs, but I would guess that a similar need for faculty involvement would be seen across the board. This underscores the above point about the need for additional research in this area, because if one individual is forming the content and objectives for a program, how can there be any way to determine if his or her individual goals match those of the institution. In this study, one faculty member was promoting the Communist ideal and encouraging students to reject
democratic values, according to the current Study Abroad director, something I am sure the university would not support. This is of course an extreme example, but the lesson still holds true. If a university wants to create globally competitive graduates, why would it then support a program to one of the very few places Americans cannot get work and do not trade with? There is a disconnect between the stated institutional mission and how that is actually playing out in real life.

However, there is a another take away, and that is, if universities want to have more control over the regions faculty members are taking their students, then they can control the development of their faculty members accordingly. If universities educate their faculty about a specific region through site visits or workshops, then faculty will take that back into their classrooms and subsequently increase student knowledge and engagement with that area. This is, in effect, a trickle down theory of cultural understanding. I doubt that individual faculty influence on study abroad destination decisions will change anytime soon, but perhaps recognizing that they are the key to development can enable universities to start more faculty development programs with strategically selected countries or international institutions and successfully encourage the development of programs in the areas they want to promote.

Finally, this study showed that one factor in particular was far more important to faculty members creating a Cuban study abroad program, and that was the creation of global citizens. Every faculty or administrator interviewed for this study sought to teach students about the world, to help students comprehend the innate humanity of all people, and learn to question the stereotypes instilled by society. Without question this was the
main factor in choosing Cuba as the site for their program. Cuba presents unique examples of each of these lessons and so serves as an ideal place to open the minds of U.S. students. The other reasons behind internationalization and study abroad that came out in the literature seemed to have only a peripheral effect on the decision to go to Cuba. Additional marketing benefits, graduate employability, and building international institutional relationships were more likely to be cited as a reason administrators would support/continue a program or as a reason students and parents would find it appealing, rather than as a goal in and of itself. It bears more study to see if this holds true for other destinations that aren’t as unique as Cuba, however I would expect to find a clear although less pronounced parallel in other sites.

This reveals one major question, why do universities and administrators need these other factors to justify the programs if they aren’t really being used to develop them? Why isn’t the creation of globally knowledgeable students enough? Perhaps the lack of research into the development process allows a bit of plausible deniability for universities, so that they can say that these other more tangible benefits are the real reason study abroad is important, rather than the intangible development of cultural awareness and tolerance. I am quite sure, that every international education professional, myself included, believes in the benefits of creating globally competent students, but perhaps responses like employability and increased university marketability are given because they can be easily measured. They have a tangible, and often quantifiable effect, which plays well in board meetings and budget decisions. I would hope that every person would question the assumption that if something cannot be measured, it is not important,
but perhaps intangible benefits like cultural competency are seen as less legitimate and so require additional justifications, even for such an amazingly complex and enlightening place as Cuba.
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Pseudonym used in Text</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Public or Private</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Type of Cuba Program</th>
<th>Participant Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A: Large Public Midwestern University</td>
<td>20,000 - 25,000 Students</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short term fine arts</td>
<td>Fine Arts Faculty Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short term Latin American studies</td>
<td>Latin American Studies Faculty Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B: Small East Coast College</td>
<td>160 - 200 Students</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Semester Spanish language and culture</td>
<td>Faculty Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C: Small Southern University</td>
<td>1,200 - 1,300 Students</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Semester Spanish language and culture</td>
<td>Study Abroad Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D: Large Private University</td>
<td>11,500 - 12,000 Students</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Short term Cuban theatre</td>
<td>Study Abroad Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E: Small Religious University</td>
<td>3,500 - 4,000 Students</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Short term Spanish language and culture</td>
<td>Faculty Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


VITA

Kari Beall grew up in Troy, Michigan. Before attending Loyola University Chicago she graduated from the University of Michigan Ann Arbor with a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Anthropology and Spanish in 2008. Kari currently works for International Education Programs as the on campus representative at Ohio University in the Office of Education Abroad and lives in Athens, Ohio.