

## Chapter 6

# Sustainable Study Abroad

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### ABSTRACT

*The number of business students in higher education pursuing an international experience continues to increase due to a range of opportunities offered by universities. International experiences lead to positive outcomes for students, but there is a misalignment between the countries sending students to the U.S. and the destinations chosen by U.S. students. Host countries selected by students for their international experience are the recipients of economic benefits, but they also are facing environmental and social consequences of over-tourism. As such, a more sustainable approach to the planning and selection of study abroad programs must be taken. This chapter reviews the data and trends for U.S. students studying abroad and international students studying in the U.S. and also looks more closely at the data for one large public university. Stakeholders are identified and the pros and cons of non-traditional study abroad destinations discussed. The chapter concludes by offering suggestions for designing programs in non-traditional study abroad destinations.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the past couple of decades international travel and study abroad experiences in higher education have been consistently growing in popularity. Different formats - from long-term exchange to short-term field trips to interning or volunteering abroad - are pursued by both undergraduate and graduate business students. Prior studies suggest that international experiences lead to positive student outcomes, such as development of cross-cultural competencies, global mindset, enhanced knowledge of international business, as well as professional and individual growth (e.g., Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Panina and Lane, 2018; Walsh and Walsh, 2018). Many universities offer study abroad programs in a variety of countries. Although American students historically prefer Western Europe as the destination for study

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7548-2.ch006

and travel (Nyaupane, Paris, and Teye, 2011), the number of non-traditional study abroad destinations is growing (Zachrisson, 2004).

The choice of the destination for study abroad is important, because it determines not only student outcomes, but also the economic, social, and environmental impact education abroad has on the host countries. From the economic standpoint, international education has emerged as a multibillion dollar business and source of revenue for host countries. Economic contributions of international students in the form of tuition payments, travel, and living expenses annually contribute around \$155 billion to the U.S. economy, \$15 billion to Australia, \$14.1 billion to the U.K., \$6 billion to Canada, and \$1.5 billion to New Zealand to name just a few countries (Lee and King, 2016).

At the same time, from the sustainability perspective, some travel destinations such as Venice, Italy or Barcelona, Spain suffer from over-tourism and are already trying to limit the number of visitors (e.g., Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato, 2018). While some popular tourist destinations around the world are struggling to accommodate incoming visitors, many countries remain unexplored by business students despite their growing importance in the global economy.

This chapter argues that a more sustainable approach to study abroad programs is needed. To this end, the chapter investigates destinations of study abroad programs of American students, and the geography of the foreign students coming to the U.S. to study. It focuses on the reasons for the choice of study abroad programs' destinations and the impact these choices have on various stakeholders - from students who participate in study abroad to local communities that host them. Due to the COVID pandemic that severely disrupted international travel, we will include study abroad and international student data for the two proceeding years: 2017-18 and 2018-19. The chapter concludes with suggesting more sustainable study abroad destination choices in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

## **STUDENT INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES - DATA AND TRENDS**

According to the Institute of International Education's annual Open Doors report, 71,850 business students pursued a credit-bearing experience abroad in 2018-19. Business students represented 20.7% of all U.S. students abroad. Business students were the second largest field of study to pursue international experiences behind 'STEM' field students which comprised 26.8% of U.S. students abroad. 'STEM' fields include agriculture, computer science, engineering, health professions, math, and physical and life sciences (Institute of International Education, 2020a).

The Institute of International Education (IIE) also identified the top 25 destinations U.S. students selected for a study abroad program in 2018-19. More than half of them (51.3%) chose a European country as the destination for their international experience. This was followed by Asia (8.3%), Latin America (6.6%), and Oceania (4.3%). Africa, the Middle East, and North America each hosted 1.8% or less of all U.S. students abroad and the list of top 25 destinations lacked a Caribbean destination (Institute of International Education, 2021).

The further analysis of the trends in study abroad destinations for U.S. students will show that the number of American students choosing to study in Western Europe is gradually decreasing. With globalization, the interest in other countries continues to grow.

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