Chapter 2
Opening the Door to Study Abroad From Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon data from Open Doors®, this chapter highlights the unique characteristics of study abroad from community colleges over the past decade. It explores patterns in destinations, durations, and student characteristics for study abroad at community colleges over this time period. Through lessons learned from IIE’s Heiskell Award winners and Generation Study Abroad (GSA) community college commitment partners, the chapter will conclude with best practices from community colleges that have made commitments to increase and diversify their study abroad programs.

WHY STUDY ABROAD?

While many four-year institutions in the United States offer education abroad opportunities for their students, a much smaller proportion of community colleges send U.S. students abroad. If community colleges are primarily focused on serving the local community and providing millions of students with workforce education, how do students studying abroad in another country support that mission? To illuminate the answer, it is important to understand the breadth and depth of benefits that study abroad yields for all students, including those at community colleges.

Research has suggested that study abroad impacts students’ academic and professional careers. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) classifies study abroad among the six “high impact practices” due to positive associations with student learning and retention (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018). Research has linked study abroad to improved grade point averages, completion rates, retention rates, and transfer rates, particularly for minority and at-risk students (Sutton & Rubin, 2010; Willett, Pellegrin, & Cooper, 2013). It is particularly notable that these effects were evident at the community college level in the California Community College Student Outcomes Abroad Research

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6252-8.ch002
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(Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2014). Furthermore, studies have indicated that students who study abroad develop intrapersonal competencies, cognitive abilities, interpersonal skills, cultural understanding, global awareness, and positive associations with their overall educational experience (Dwyer, 2004; Gaia, 2015; Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Coker, Heiser, and Taylor, 2018; Hubbard, Rexeisen, & Watson, 2018). For example, Farrugia and Sanger’s (2017) national study of 4,500 U.S. college and university alumni found that over half of respondents self-reported that their study abroad experiences significantly developed or improved their flexibility/adaptability, self-awareness, curiosity, confidence, problem-solving, intercultural, interpersonal, and communication skills (Figure 1), and that the majority of survey respondents believed that their time abroad directly contributed to a job offer. Once students have secured a job, Partlo and Ampaw’s (2018) research found that students who participated in study abroad had higher earnings in the workforce one year after graduation.

HOW MANY U.S. STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD FROM COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

Despite research indicating positive impacts academically and professionally, few community college students study abroad. Only 6,905 U.S. community college students studied abroad in 2015/16 accord-

Figure 1. Reported skill development or improvement through study abroad