

The Freshman Factor:

Outcomes of Short-Term Education Abroad Programs on First-Year Students

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Primary question:

How is the study abroad experience different for first-year students than for second-year students with respect to . . .

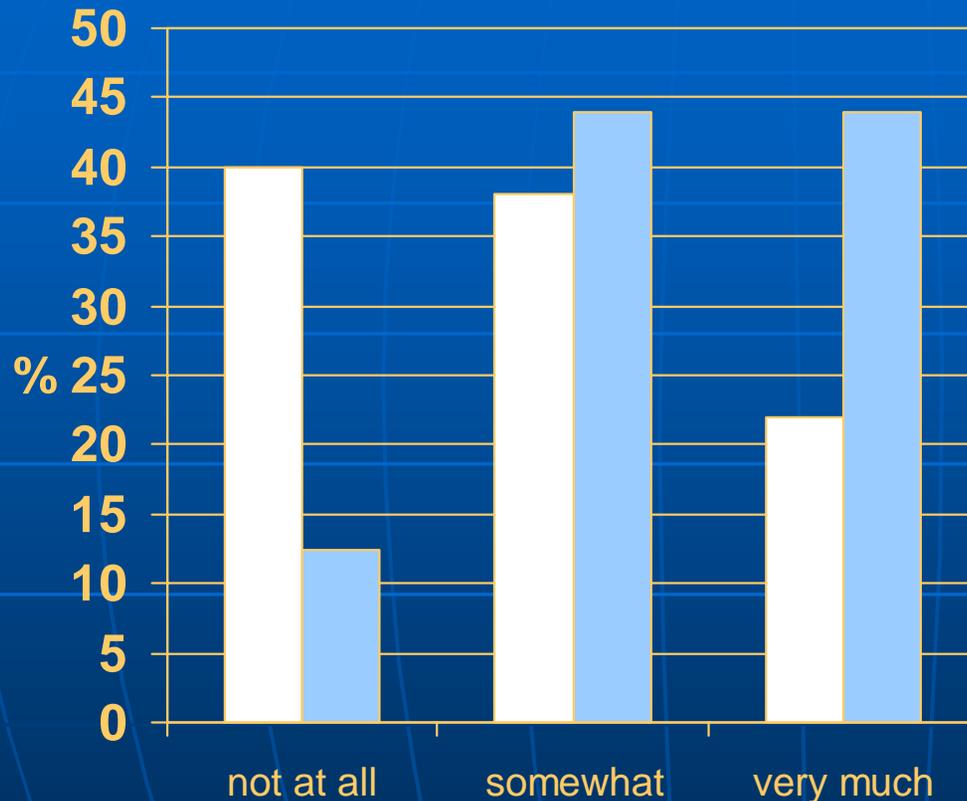
- motivating factors for participation?
- self-reported learning while abroad?
- self-reported personal growth while abroad?
- intent to study abroad again?

AND: What about students who study abroad as freshmen and as again sophomores (repeaters)?

Methodology

- written survey administered at end of January term (month-long program abroad)
- respondents represent wide variety of programs, locations, and disciplines
- 50 freshmen, 50 sophomore first-timers, and 20 sophomore repeater respondents
- Likert-scale, quantitative items; one short-answer question
- Freshmen & repeaters identified for future tracking; sophomores anonymous (control)

Friends & Classmates as Influence on Study Abroad Decision



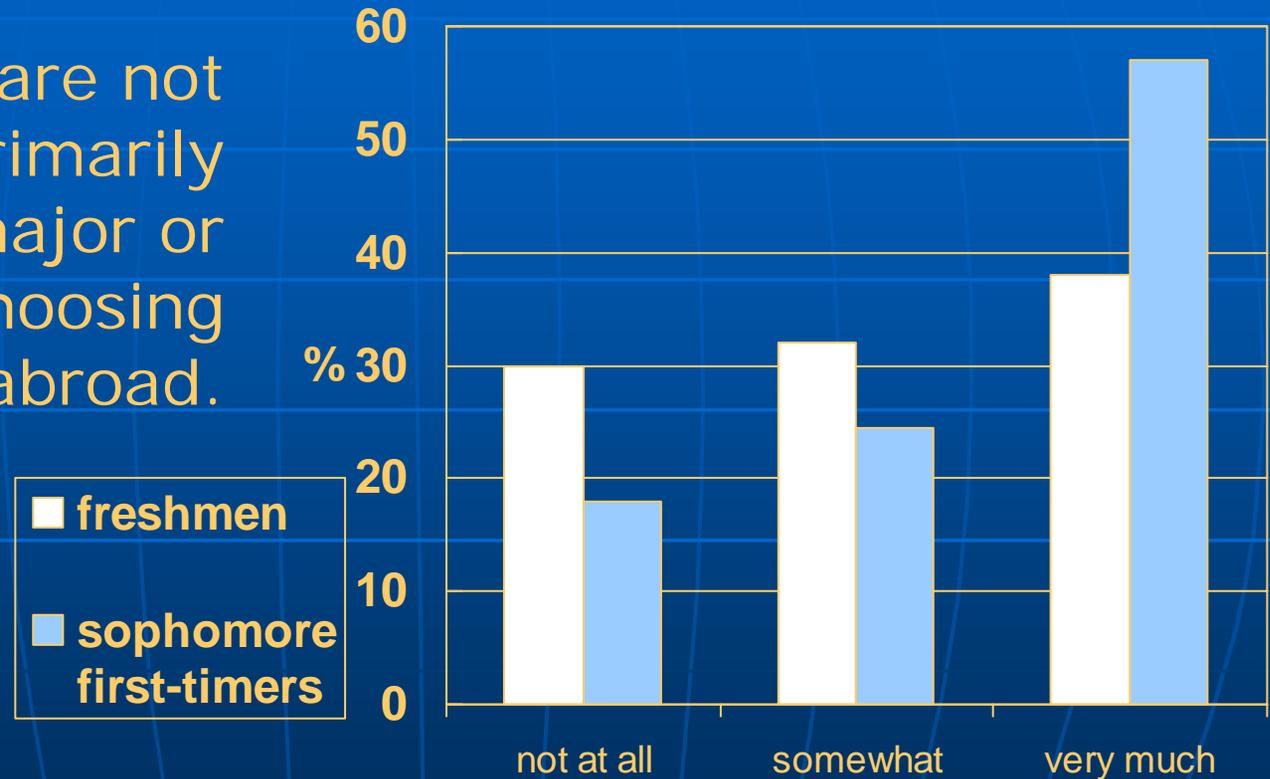
■ freshmen
■ sophomore first-timers

Freshmen are influenced much less by their peers because they know fewer students on campus than sophomores do.

There was no significant difference between groups regarding other influencing individuals (parents, program director, advisor, other professor).

Program Relevance to Career/Major as Influence on Study Abroad Decision

Freshmen are not thinking primarily about their major or career when choosing to go abroad.

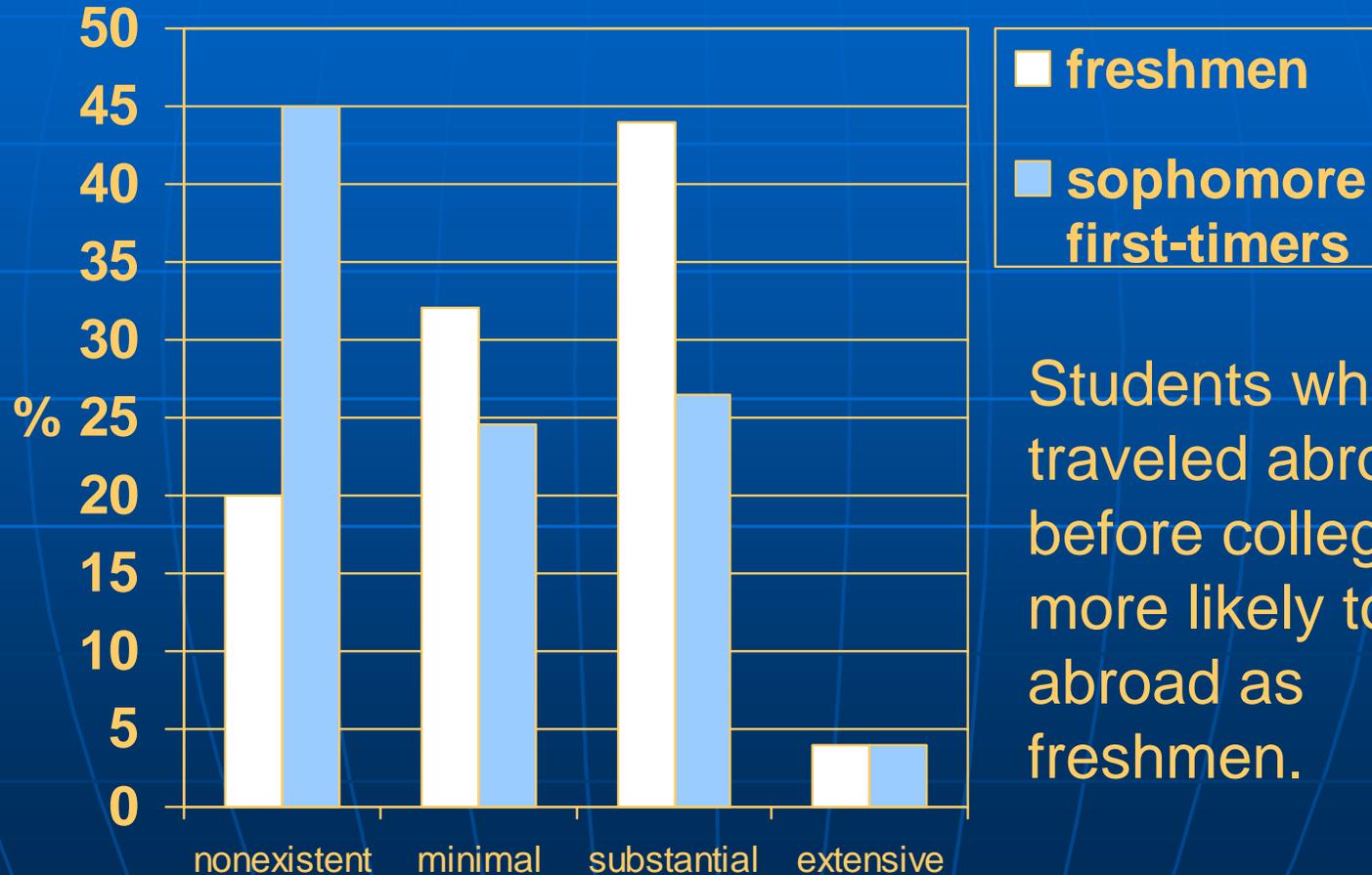


No significant differences were found between groups regarding other influencing factors (opportunity for fun, independence, to make friends, etc.)

Main Influencing Factors (All Groups)

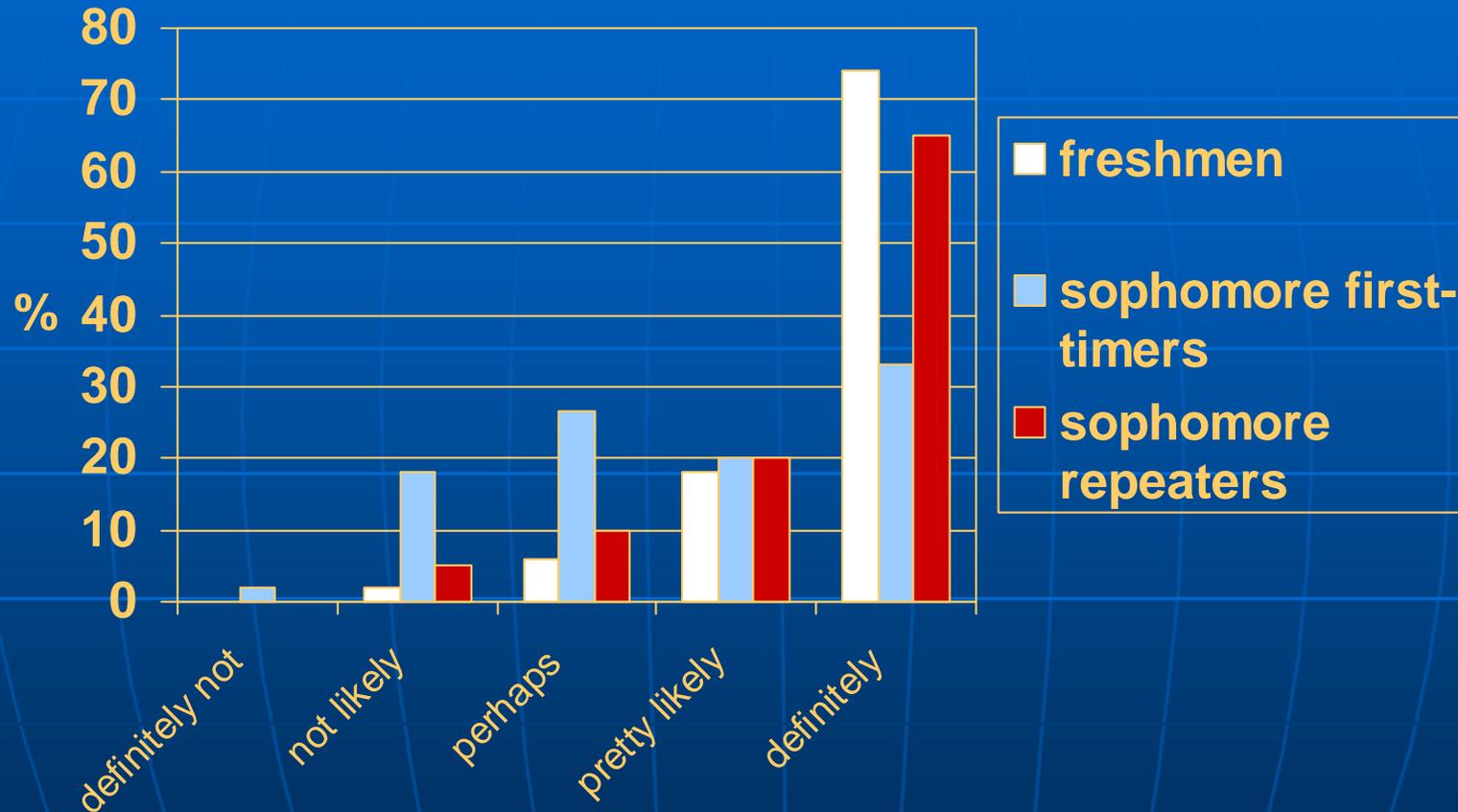
- #1: learn about another country (48% said this most influenced their decision to study abroad)
- #2: opportunity for fun/excitement (37% said this was factor #2)
- #3: opportunity for growth/challenge (24% said this was factor #3)

Degree of International Travel Experience Prior to Study Abroad



Students who have traveled abroad before college are more likely to study abroad as freshmen.

Intent to Study Abroad Again



Those who study abroad as freshmen are more likely to want to study abroad again.

Student Learning

- Sophomore first-timers reported learning more than freshmen about current political or social issues outside of the U.S.
- No other significant differences were found in self-reported learning outcomes of freshmen versus sophomore first-timers.

Student Learning:

Sophomore first-timers reported learning more than repeaters during January with regard to . . .

- general international travel (packing, jet-lag, exchange rates, etc.);
- how things work in another country (public transportation, shopping, dining out);
- how Americans are perceived abroad;
- how the U.S. is perceived;
- negotiating life as a foreigner.

Student Learning:

Freshmen reported learning more than sophomore repeaters with regard to:

- general international travel (packing, jet-lag, exchange rates, etc.);
- how Americans are perceived abroad;
- how the U.S. is perceived.

Perhaps freshmen's prior travel experience explains why they (unlike sophomore first-timers) didn't report learning more than sophomore repeaters about how things work in another country and negotiating life as a foreigner.

Student Learning:

Among all groups, at least 85% reported learning a moderate or great amount of new information about . . .

- current political or social issues outside of the U.S.;
- the people of another country;
- the history and culture of another country;
- the geography of another country;
- living life as a foreigner.

Personal Growth

- No significant differences emerged among first-time participants.
- No significant differences emerged between freshmen and sophomore repeaters.
- Sophomore first-timers reported more growth than repeaters in the areas of flexibility/adaptability and openness to understanding other viewpoints.
- Among all groups, at least 80% reported moderate to high growth in independence, cultural sophistication, awareness of international issues, overall maturity, self-confidence, and flexibility/adaptability.

How have you changed from this experience?

(comments representing 10% or more of responses)

Freshmen

Sophomore First-Timers

- Adaptability 18%
 - Cultural understanding 18%
 - Language skills 12% (high percentage of freshmen participated in language-based programs)
- Confidence 18%
 - Adaptability 16%
 - Global awareness 14%
 - Future travel desire 14%
 - Cultural understanding 10%
- Perhaps freshmen felt more confident already since many of them had traveled before.
 - Desire for future travel was sparked in some sophomores. (Freshmen already expressed greater intent to study abroad⁴)

Freshmen, why now?

Over 50% of freshmen responded with one or more comments such as these when asked why they chose to study abroad freshmen year instead of waiting:

- Why wait? Great opportunity!
- Didn't want to be at home or in Delaware for 5 weeks.
- Plan on studying abroad multiple times.
- Liked idea of a freshman-only program. (About half of freshmen surveyed participated in freshman-only programs.)

Sophomores, any regrets?

Do sophomore first-timers regret not studying abroad as freshmen?

No! 80% say that sophomore year was the right time for them. Only 20% wish they had studied abroad sooner.

Main Conclusions

- Pre-college travel plays a large role in whether students choose to study abroad freshman year.
- Students who study abroad freshman year express greater intent to study abroad again; therefore pre-college travel influences future study abroad decisions.
- Students report virtually the same amount of learning on first and second study abroad programs, so multiple programs are worthwhile.
- Exceptions to the above include travel logistics and how Americans are perceived abroad. Most learning in these areas occurs on first-time sojourns.
- More differences emerged between first-timers and repeaters than among all first timers. Study abroad experience plays a larger role than academic year (freshman vs. sophomore).
- Main reasons for study abroad are not influenced by experience or academic year.